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BY

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I.

PLEADING FOR PRAYER.

February 21, 1886.

“Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ’s sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me; that I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judæa; and that my service which I have for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints; that I may come unto you with joy by the will of God, and may with you be refreshed. Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.”—ROMANS XV. 30-33.

THE apostle of the Gentiles held a very useful and glorious office; but he had by no means a smooth path in life. When we read the account of his sufferings, and persecutions, and labors, we wonder how a single individual could have gone through them all. He was a true hero; though a Hebrew of the Hebrews, he stands in the very front of the whole Gentile church as its founder and teacher under God, and we owe to him what we can never fully estimate. When we consider the struggles of his life, we do not wonder that the apostle was sometimes in great sorrow of heart, and heavily burdened in spirit. He was so at the time when he wrote this Epistle to the Christian friends at Rome. It was a great delight to him to have to go to Jerusalem—it was a place which was much revered and loved by him; it was a greater privilege for him to go and exchange salutations with his brother apostles; and it was the most joyous privilege of all to be the bearer of a contribution from the Gen-

tiles to relieve the necessities of the saints at Jerusalem. He rejoiced much more in that gift to Jewish believers than if it had been anything for himself. But he was well aware that there were those in Judæa who hated him with deadly hatred, and would seek his life. He had been the rising hope of the Jewish party, and he had become a Christian; therefore the bigoted Jews regarded him as an apostate from the faith of their fathers. They had, moreover, a special venom against him, since he was more bold than any other Christian teacher in going among the Gentiles, and shaking off altogether the bonds of the ceremonial law; he also came out more clearly than any other man upon the doctrines of grace, and salvation by the cross of Christ, and this provoked the fiercest hostility. Paul had also the apprehension that he would not be well received even by the brethren at Jerusalem. He knew what a strong conservative feeling there was among the circumcision for the maintenance of the old Jewish law, and how he was a marked man because he had shaken off entirely that yoke of bondage. Thus he had fears as to foes, and doubts about friends. His case was peculiarly hard.

What did Paul do when his spirit was greatly oppressed? He wrote to his brethren to pray for him. He asked the good friends at Rome that they would lift up their hearts earnestly and unitedly to God, that he might be preserved from the double evil which threatened him. In the last chapter of this epistle we have the names of a great many of those private individuals at Rome to whom the apostle appealed. We do not know any of them, except it be Priscilla and Aquila, of whom we have heard elsewhere; but this great man, this inspired apostle of God, who was not

a whit behind the very chief of Christ's servants, makes his appeal to these unknown and humble individuals, that they would strive together with him in their prayers. I delight in this ; it shows the lowly spirit of the apostle Paul, and it reveals to us his high value for the prayers of obscure men and women. He feels that he needs what the prayers of these people can bring to him ; he is sure that without those prayers he will be in danger of failure, but that with them he will be strong for his great enterprise. He sees what prayer can do, and he would arouse it into powerful action.

Does it astonish you that a man so rich in grace as Paul should be asking prayers of these unknown saints ? It need not astonish you ; for it is the rule with the truly great to think most highly of others. In proportion as a man grows in grace he feels his dependence upon God, and, in a certain sense, his dependence upon God's people. He decreases in his own esteem, and his brethren increase in his estimation. A flourishing tradesman, a man who has a large business, is the man who needs others, he prospers by setting others to labor on his behalf ; the larger his trade, the more he is dependent upon those around him. The apostle was, so to speak, a great master-trader for the Lord Jesus ; he did a great business for his Lord, and he felt that he could not carry it on unless he had the co-operation of many helpers. He did not so much want what employers harshly call "hands" to work for him, but he did need hearts to plead for him, and he therefore sent all the way to Rome to seek such assistance. He wrote to those whom he had never seen, and begged their prayers, as if he pleaded for his life. The great apostle entreats Tryphena and Tryphosa,

and Mary and Julia, to pray for him. His great enterprise needs their supplications. In a great battle the general's name is mentioned; but what could he have done without the common soldiers? Wellington will always be associated with Waterloo; but, after all, it was a soldiers' battle. What could the commander have done if those in the ranks had failed him? The commander-in-chief might very well have touched his hat to the least subaltern or to the humblest private, and have said, "I thank you, comrade. Without you we could not have conquered." The chief troubles of the great day of Waterloo arose from certain very doubtful allies, who wavered in the hour of battle—those were the general's weakness; but his hope and strength lay in those regiments which were as an iron wall against the enemy. Even thus the faithful are our joy and crown; but the unstable are our sorrow and weakness. Every ministering servant of the Lord Jesus Christ is in much the same condition as Paul; true, we are of a lower grade, and our work is on a smaller scale; but our needs are just as great. We have not all the grace which Paul possessed; but for that very reason we make the more pathetic an appeal to you, our friends and fellow-helpers, while we use the apostle's language, and cry, "We beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with us in your prayers to God for us."

I shall call your attention to this text with the longing in my own heart that I may more abundantly myself live in your prayers. I have to rejoice in the prayers of thousands of holy men and women who love me in the Lord. I am deeply grateful for the affectionate supplication of multitudes whom I have

not seen in the flesh, to whom the printed sermons go week by week. I am a debtor, not only to the beloved people around me, but to a larger company all over the world. These are my comfort, my riches, my strength. To such I speak at this time. Beloved, I need your prayers more than ever. I am more and more conscious of their value; do not restrain them. Just now there is to me a special need of grace on many accounts, and I hope that some of those who have long borne me up will give me a special portion of aid at this hour. I am not worthy to use the same language as the apostle Paul, but I know no better, and my necessity is even greater than his: therefore I borrow his words, and say, "I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me."

In our text there are two things: *prayer asked*, and *a blessing given*—"Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen."

I. First, here is PRAYER ASKED FOR.

We will look at the apostle's request for prayer in general, and then afterwards we will look to the details which are mentioned in the thirty-first verse.

First, here is *a request to the people of God for prayer in general*. He asks it *for himself*—"That ye strive together with me in your prayers to God *for me*." He knew his own weakness, he knew the difficulty of the work to which he had been called, he knew that if he failed in his enterprise it would be a sad failure, injurious through coming ages to the entire church. He cried, "Agonize *for me*," because he felt that much depended upon him. It is like a man who is willing to lead the forlorn hope; but he says to his comrades,

“You will support me.” It is like one who is willing to go into a far country, bearing his life in his hands; but he plaintively exclaims, “You won’t forget me, will you? Though you stay at home, you will think of me!” It reminds us of Carey, who says, when he goes to India, “I will go down into the pit, but brother Fuller and the rest of you must hold the rope.” Can we refuse the request? Would it not be treachery? It is not according to the heart of true yoke-fellows, it is not according to the instincts of our common humanity, that we should desert any man whom we set in the front of the battle. If we choose a man to be our representative in the service of our God, we will not desert him. A man cannot be charged with egotism if he begs for personal support when he is engaged in labors for others, and is not seeking himself but the success of the great cause. Under heavy responsibilities he does well to enlist the sympathies and prayers of those whom he is serving; and he has a right to have them. Beloved friends, if you are with me in the great battle for God and truth, and if you count me worthy to bear the brunt of this war, I beseech you for Christ’s sake support me by your importunate wrestlings at the throne of grace. Pray for all ministers and workers, but pray also for me. I am of all men the most miserable if you deny me this.

Observe in what relationship he regards them when he puts the request. “Now,” saith he, “I beseech you, *brethren*.” “I beseech you.” It is the strongest word of entreaty he can find. It is as if he said, “I go down on my knees to you, and implore you. I ask it of you as the greatest favor you can do me. I ask it of you as the dearest token of your love, that you

strive together with me in your prayers to God for me." He does not call them companions, or fellow-workers, or friends; but he addresses them as brothers. "You are my brethren," saith he; "I feel a love to you, you Romans, converted to God. I have a longing in my heart to see you; and though I have not so much as spoken to you face to face, yet we are brothers. The life that is in you beats also in my heart; we are born again of the same Father, we are quickened by the same Spirit, we are redeemed by the same Saviour, therefore, spiritually, we are brethren. Shall not brothers pray for one another? He seems to say, "If ye be brethren, show this token of your brotherhood. You cannot go up with me to Jerusalem, and share my danger, but you can be with me in spirit, and by your prayers surround me with divine protection. I do not ask you to come, ye Romans, with your swords and shields, and make a body-guard about me; but I do beg of you, my true brothers, if you be so indeed, to agonize together with me in your prayers to God for me." If there remains in the Christian church any brotherhood whatsoever, every leader of the host, every preacher of the gospel, every pastor of a church, should receive the proof of that brotherhood in the shape of daily intercession. Every sent servant of God beseeches his brethren that they strive together with him in prayer to God for him; and I am not a whit behind any of them in the urgency of my request to the many who have hitherto proved themselves my brethren. I know your love has not grown cold to me: I have abundant evidence of that. O my brothers, act as brothers to me now, and beseech the Lord to bless me.

But observe what kind of prayer he asks for: "That

ye strive together,"—that ye "*agonize*,"—that is the word. You have before you in this expression a reminder of that great agony in Gethsemane, and I should think the apostle had that picture before his eyes. In the garden our Lord not only prayed as was his wont, but with strong crying and tears he made his appeal to God. "Being in an agony he prayed more earnestly." He wrestled till he "sweat as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground," but none agonized together with him. That was one of the deepest shades of the picture, that he must tread the wine-press alone, and of the people there must be none with him. Yet did our Lord seem to ask for sympathy and help.

"Backward and forward thrice he ran,
As if he sought some help from man;"

but he found none even to watch with him one hour, much less to agonize with him. The apostle felt that an agony alone was too bitter for him, and he therefore piteously cries, "I beseech you, brethren, that ye agonize with me in prayer to God for me." Now, as the disciples ought to have sympathized with the Saviour, and entered into his direful grief, but did not, even so it may happen to us. But, brethren, I trust that the unfaithfulness to the Master will not be repeated upon his servants. It remains to all that are true brethren in Christ that, when they see a man in agony of heart for Christ's sake and for souls' sake, they should bow the knee side by side with him, and be true brothers to him. When his labors become intense, when his difficulties are multiplied, when his heart begins to sink, and his strength is failing him, then the man must wrestle with his God, then his brethren must wrestle at his side. When the up-

lifted hands of Moses are known to bring a blessing, Aaron and Hur must stay them up when they are seen to grow weary. When Jacob is struggling at Jabbok, and we see him there, we must turn in and help him to detain the angel of the covenant. If one man can hold him fast by saying, "I will not let thee go unless thou bless me," surely a score of you can make a cordon round about him, and speedily win the blessing. What may not a hundred do? Let us try the power of agonizing prayer! Do we know as yet what it means? Let us rise as one man and cry, "O angel, whose hands are full of benedictions, we will not let thee go, except thou give us thine own blessing; the blessing of thy covenant." If two of you are agreed as touching anything concerning the kingdom, you shall be heard; but what if hundreds and thousands of the faithful are of one mind and one mouth in this matter? Will you not at once cry unto God, "Bless thou thy servants; establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it"? You see it is earnest prayer which Paul asks for, not the prayer which foams itself away in words; but prayer with force, with energy, with humble boldness, with intensity of desire, with awful earnestness; prayer which, like a deep, hidden torrent, cuts a channel even through a rock. His request was "that ye wrestle with me in your prayers to God for me;" and this is our request this day.

He does not, however, wish for a single moment to exclude himself from the prayer; for he says, "that ye agonize *with me*." He is to be the first agonizer. This should be the position of every minister. We ought to be examples of wrestling prayer. How I wish that you could realize more fully the work allot-

ted to the apostles when they said that it was not reason that they should leave the word of God to serve tables! There was a difference about the distribution of the alms-money among the widows, and the twelve declared that they could not attend to such a matter; for, said they, "We will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word." This would be heaven to me. But notice that at least half, and the first half, of their work lay in prayer. Oh, if that could be our portion! If we could but have full space for prayer and meditation, and were set free from the petty secularities and differences incident to church life. Oh that we could have more to do with him from whose right hand the supreme blessing comes—that were a joy indeed! But even if the apostle could thus himself agonize, he did not feel satisfied; for he beseeches others to wrestle with him in prayer to God. He sought communion in supplication. Even thus would I beseech you, brethren, to come with me into the inner chamber; come with me into the holy of holies; let us together approach the mercy-seat. Lend me the help of all the spiritual force you have, that we may together agonize in prayer to God, that the blessing may descend upon the enterprise now in my hands. You see the sort of prayer which is needed, even the effectual fervent prayer of righteous men; and may the Holy Spirit brace up our spirits, that we may be able to join in such agonizing in this time of need.

This verse is one of the most intense I ever remember to have read, even in so intense a book as this Holy Scripture. Observe the fervency of the pleading—"Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake." What an argument! That name is

full of power with true hearts. You owe him everything, you him your souls, you owe him every hope for the future, every comfort in the present, and every happy memory of the past. Your life would have been worse than death apart from him. His love to you constrains you, because you thus judge, that when one died for all, all died, and that you so died that henceforth you should not live unto yourselves but unto him. Now, saith he, as you cannot repay the Lord Jesus Christ personally, repay it to his servant by your prayers; join him in his agony in recollection of that greater agony in which none could join, by which you were redeemed from death and hell. If there be any love to Christ in a Christian's heart he must pray that the Holy Spirit would bless the ministry of the word. Surely your hearts must be turned to stone if you do not plead for a blessing upon that ministry by which you yourselves have been brought to Christ. If I have been a spiritual father to any of you, you will not fail to pray for me. Will you? As you love that Saviour whom I preach, I beseech you, for the sake of Jesus Christ, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me.

But he adds to that another argument—“*for the love of the Spirit.*” If the Spirit of God has indeed loved you and proved it by quickening and sanctifying you, then pray for his ministers. If the Spirit of God has created a love in you, which is stronger than mere natural affection,—a love which does not arise out of any fleshly relationship, or any mere association, or any casual partiality, but a love which the Holy Spirit himself creates and fosters in your heart—then pray for me. If there be such love in you, not natural and temporary, but spiritual, and therefore everlasting,

then pray for the Lord's servant. If there be in you a love which may exist, nay, will exist, in heaven itself; if there be such a love in you, then saith the apostle, I beseech you, pray for me. Brethren, I say the same. Unless our profession is a lie we love each other, and we must therefore show that love by our prayers for one another. Especially if any of you have been brought to the Lord Jesus Christ by the ministry of any man whom God favors with his help, then that man must live for ever in your hearts, and be remembered in your prayers. You cannot escape from the obligation of intercession for the man who brought you to Jesus. As long as you live, and as long as he remains faithful, you must bear him on your heart in supplication. It must be so: the love of the Spirit has knit us to one another, and none can put us asunder. Ours is no feigned unity, but deep, and true, and real. In Christ Jesus, my brother, there has been begotten in our hearts an affection for one another which death itself shall not destroy. We will not be separated. Then, by the love of the Spirit, I beseech you that ye agonize together with me in your prayers to God for me. Every word pleads with tears: there is not a waste letter in the whole verse.

Why do you think the apostle at that special time asked these brethren to pray for him so? Was it not because he believed in the providence of God? He was going up to Jerusalem, and the Jews would seek to slay him. They hunted him in every place, and now he was going into the lion's den; but he believed that God in Providence could overrule all things, so that he should not suffer injury at the hands of bloodthirsty zealots, but should be delivered out of their malicious power. *We* also believe in God

that worketh all things; therefore, let us pray that all opposition to his gospel may be overcome.

He believed also in the influence that God can have upon men's hearts, especially upon the hearts of his own people. He was afraid that the Jewish believers would be very cold to him, and therefore he prays God that his Holy Spirit may warm their hearts, and make them full of love, so that the offerings he took to them from the Grecian churches might be accepted, and might foster a sense of hearty fellowship in the hearts of the Hebrew saints towards their Gentile brethren. Do you not also believe that the hearts of all men are in the hands of the Lord? Do you not believe in the supremacy of the will of God over the freewill of man? Do you not rejoice that there is not only a Providence that shapes our ends, but a secret influence which moulds men's hearts? Therefore it is that we urge you to plead with God that we also may have acceptance with his people. We desire to render them much service, and to enjoy their loving regard. It is painful to us to differ with any, and joyous to be in communion with all parts of the church of our Lord Jesus Christ.

What is more than this, the apostle believed in the power of the prayers of simple people so to move the mind of God that he would exert his hand in providence and his influence over the hearts of men. Never let us imagine that the doctrine of the fixity of events, or the supremacy of law, as the philosophers call it, is at all contrary to the truth that prayer is effectual for its own ends and purposes. In olden times a warrior was going forth to battle for his country, and a certain preacher of the word said to him, "My prayer is made continually for you that you may be

victorious." The warrior, in his philosophic doubt, replied that he saw no use in the promised prayers; for if God had determined to give him victory, he would have it without prayer; and if fate had decreed that he should be defeated, prayers could not prevent it. To which the godly man very properly replied, "Then take off your helmet and your coat of mail, and hang up your sword and buckler. Go not forth to battle at all with your men-at-arms; for, indeed, if the Lord is to conquer your enemies he can do it without your weapons, and if he will not prosper you, it is in vain for you to mount your war-horse." The argument, when carried out, answers itself: there is, in truth, no force in it. The net result of such reasoning would be absolute inaction. Common sense shows us how absurd it is. All means are to be used, notwithstanding the eternal purpose of God; for that purpose includes means and their uses. We declare that among the most potent means in all the world is prayer; and this must not be neglected. There are certain ascertained forces, and among those forces, always to be reckoned with and relied upon, is the force of the cry of God's dear children to their great Father in Heaven; in other words, the power of prayer. In prayer we present the sacrifice of God's own Son to God's own self, and prevail by its means. O brothers and sisters, we ask your prayers without doubt or question. We know and are persuaded that they will avail much. By your power in prayer God's power will be set in motion, and by that force all will be accomplished which shall be for his glory and for our good.

I hope you have been so far interested; may God

grant you may have been influenced by these remarks, and excited to incessant intercession!

In our text there is, in the next place, *a statement of the apostle's desires in detail.* When we pray, we should make a point of praying for something distinctly. There is a general kind of praying, which fails from want of precision. It is as if a regiment of soldiers should all fire off their guns anyhow; possibly somebody would be killed, but the majority of the enemy would be missed. I believe that at the battle of Waterloo, there were no arms of precision, they had only the old Brown Bess, and though the battle was won, it has been said it took as much lead to kill a man as the weight of the man's body. This is a figure of the comparative failure of indistinct, generalizing prayer. If you pray anyhow, if it be with sincerity, a measure of blessing results from it; but it will take a great deal of such praying to accomplish much. But if you plead for certain mercies definitely and distinctly, with firm unstaggering faith, you shall richly succeed.

Our apostle gives his friends three things to pray for: First, he would have them ask that he might be delivered from them that did not believe in Judæa. He was delivered, not perhaps in the precise manner which he hoped for; but he was to the letter delivered from the unbelieving Jews. Certain zealots bound themselves with an oath that they would not eat till they had slain him; but they went a long while hungry; for the arm of the Roman Empire was stretched forth to protect Paul against his infuriated countrymen. Strange it was that Cæsar's power must be as a shield around the feeble servant of the mighty God! From raging mobs and secret confederacies Paul was saved, apparently, by Roman soldiers, but secretly by

Roman saints. Against all oppositions from without let us pray.

They were also to ask of the Lord that his service which he had for Jerusalem might be accepted of the saints. This also was granted; the brethren did accept Paul's embassy. He met with little difficulty; the contribution was accepted with much gratitude, and we do not hear afterwards of those bickerings between the Jewish and the Gentile believers. Much was done in the apostolic college at Jerusalem to create a heartier feeling towards the Gentile brethren, and the kingdom of Christ was henceforth owned to be over all races and kindreds of men. Paul did accomplish very much, and had comfort in his mission to the mother church. Oh that we also could be of service to that community of Christians to which we belong! Brethren, pray that our word may be accepted of our own brethren; for some of these are wandering from the way of truth.

They were to pray next, that he might come unto them with joy by the will of God; and might, with them, be refreshed. That was to be the third prayer. It is to be observed that this petition also was heard, but it was not answered as Paul might have expected or desired. He did come to them according to the will of God rather than by his own will. He may or not have been on his way to Spain, as he purposed: he certainly was on his way to prison, as he had not purposed. His first prayer, that he might be delivered from them that believe not in Judæa, was not answered in the way of his never being in danger from them, or coming into difficulties through them; but he was delivered out of their hands by becoming a prisoner to the Roman governor, and being sent un-

der his guardianship to Cæsar, to whom he had appealed. By that means he travelled to Rome at the expense of the Imperial Government, and on landing at Puteoli, close to Naples, he found friends waiting for him; and as soon as the Roman brethren heard of his landing, they dispatched a company to meet him at Appii Forum, a place on the road to Rome, where they stopped to change horses, and to take refreshments. There he saw his prayer beginning to be answered. Further on, at a place called the Three Taverns, more dear friends from Rome met him, "whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage." The Roman saints had long looked for the apostle, and he came at last—an ambassador in bonds, a prisoner who must go to the Prætorian guard-room, and there await the Emperor's will and pleasure. They had not expected to see him in such case; but they were not ashamed of his chain. They made a considerable journey to meet him, and he was filled with their company, and refreshed by their fellowship, as he had desired. Even his imprisonment may have been a rest for him; it could not have involved such wear and tear as his former labors and persecutions. We read the other day that Holloway Gaol is a choice place for rest and enjoyment to a man with a clear conscience; and I dare say that Paul found his confinement at Rome to be rather a refreshment than otherwise after his years of weariness and buffetings. There he was shut away from his furious persecutors; certainly, no Jew could take his life there. He was not afraid of being stoned while in imperial custody; and probably he was the more at ease because he had not to preach to such as the Corinthians and the Galatians, from whom he had asked no prayers, but had received

much grief. He asked the Ephesians and Philippians, the Colossians and the Romans, to pray for him; but from the others he would have received little benefit, for they were very weak in the faith, and troubled with sad disorders. He was in his imprisonment clear of those fickle and quarrelsome folk who had often pained him. His confinement under guard would not permit of his preaching himself to death, or wearing himself out with watchings; the soldier who kept him would make him reasonable; and so, I have no doubt, by the will of God he received precisely what he had asked his friends to pray for: "that I may come unto you with joy by the will of God, and may with you be refreshed." It would not have been Paul's will to have come to Rome with a chain on his wrist, binding him to a soldier; but he did so come, for this was the will of God, and was the surest way to his being refreshed. Paul refreshed the Romans and they refreshed him; and thus he had a happy sojourn in Rome. God was with him, and he had the privilege of testifying of Christ before the Roman emperor, and making Jesus to be known even in Cæsar's household. Thus, brethren, the Lord heard the prayer of his servants. He will also hear our prayers; not in my way, not in your way, but in the way which Paul has indicated, namely, "by the will of God." Therefore pray for a blessing, and leave the way of its coming to the good Lord who knoweth all things. Rest you sure that it will come by the will of God, and then it will be according to our will if we are in full accord with the Lord, as we ought to be. See the efficacy of prayer, then, in Paul's case; though the desire did not seem to be accomplished, yet it was so. When the Lord does not appear to hear his people's prayers he is hearing

them none the less, yea, rather he is answering them all the more fully and graciously. When the Lord replies by terrible things in righteousness, rather than by sweet, smooth deeds of kindness, he is doubly blessing us. Do not vessels often sail more swiftly with a side wind than they would do with a directly fair wind? The sails are more under the action of a side wind than if it blew directly behind them. The Lord often gives his people side gales, and these turn out to be the best they can have. Let us trust the divine wisdom, and rest assured that the Lord will do better things for us than we can ask or even think.

II. I have but little time left to notice THE BLESSING GIVEN; indeed it occupies but one verse in the text, and that verse is the shortest of the four, and therefore I may give it due consideration in a brief space. See how Paul, with all his anxiety to gain the prayers of his friends, cannot finish the chapter without uttering a benediction upon them. "*Now the God of peace.*" What a blessed name! In the Old Testament Scriptures he is the "Lord of Hosts;" but that is never the style in the New Testament. The "Lord of Hosts" is God as he was revealed under the old dispensation: in the majesty of his power, "the Lord is a man of war, the Lord is his name." But now that our Lord Jesus Christ has further unveiled the Father, we see him as "the God of peace." Is not this a greater, sweeter, and more cheering title? O God of peace, we long for thy presence with us all!

What does Paul wish for them? "The God of peace *be with you,*" not only "peace be with you," but, better far—"The God of peace," and so the source and fountain of peace. He wishes them, not the drops, but the fountain itself; not the light only, but the sun.

He would have God himself to be with us as "the God of peace." He would have the Lord to fill us with an inward peace, so that we may never be disturbed in our mind. He would have the Lord shed abroad his own peace in our hearts, so that we may also feel at peace with God: no cloud coming between our souls and our heavenly Father: no ground of quarrel arising between us and the great King.

When "the God of peace" makes peace with himself, and so keeps our minds at peace within, he also creates peace with one another, so that we bear one another's burdens; and those who are strong are willing to bear the infirmities of the weak. "The God of peace be with you."

Our apostle says, "the God of peace be with *you all*,"—not with some of you, with Priscilla and Aquila, but with Mary, and Amplias, and Apelles, and Tryphena and Tryphosa, and with "the beloved Parris, which labored much in the Lord," and with "Rufus chosen in the Lord, and his mother," and "Philologus, and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints which are with them." The benediction is, "The God of peace be with you *all*." Unless all are at peace, none can be perfectly quiet. One brother who is quarrelsome can keep a whole church in trouble. One fellow knocking about the boat may stop the oarsmen, rend the sails, and run the boat on a rock. I should not like one stray shot from a rifle to be travelling near my windows; for even if all the other shot which are in the armory should lie quiet, that one flying danger might be the end of me. Oh that the peace of God may be with *all* the saints in *all* the churches! It is a blessed benediction. Such a benediction we pronounce with all our

heart this morning—"Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen."

Do you not think that Paul implies that this will be the *result* of their prayer? If you will but strive together with me in your prayers, then the God of peace will be with you. May we not view it as the *reward* of such prayer? You have prayed for the Lord's servant, and now God will bless you with an abundance of peace. Or did he hint that this is a necessary *condition* and *cause* of true prayer? When they were all at peace among themselves, and happy in their own minds, and full of communion with God, then they would begin to pray to God's servants. Put it first or last, may this peace come to you, and may there be hearty pleading prayer to God that his blessing may rest upon the church, and upon the testimony of his servants.

Now we draw to a close, brethren. Prayer is sought most earnestly by me at this moment. I speak, I think, in the name of all those who have to stand prominent as preachers of the gospel of Christ. We beseech you, our beloved friends and fellow-laborers, that you wrestle together with us with God on our behalf, that our testimony may be with power and with success; for the times are very difficult. The very air is full of unbelief. The solid earth seems well nigh to tremble with unrest, social and political—a deep and terrible unrest that fills us with dark forebodings of the future. The hope of the world lies, under God, in the church of Jesus Christ. Therefore we beseech you, brethren, if in other days and softer times you did in a measure restrain prayer, do so no longer, but wrestle for us with God. What is coming no man knoweth. We wish not to play the

Cassandra, prophesying evil things continually ; but who is there, though he be a prophet bright-eyed as Isaiah, who can give a good forecast? Are not all the signs of the times big with terror? Therefore to your tents, O Israel, and in your tents cry to God that a blessing may come upon this nation and the world.

Men are perishing all around us. Whatever may have been the state of the world in Paul's day—and it was, no doubt, horrible to the last degree—it is not much better now; and the population of the world has so largely increased since those days that all her problems have become more difficult. We are much better aware of the miseries of vast populations than people could have been in apostolic times. Paul knew but little of the world except that portion of it which bordered on the Mediterranean Sea: the whole world then seemed to lie in a nutshell; but now our discoverers and geographers, our steam-boats and telegraphs, have brought a greater world close to our doors. We share with the sorrows of India; we groan in the darkness of Africa; the cries of China are at our doors, and Egypt's griefs are our own. If a population anywhere is starving or suffering oppression, our newspapers declare the evil to all readers, and general feeling is awakened. Our sympathies for humanity are called forth much more than in former times; and, so far, this is good; but then it heaps heavier burdens upon the thoughtful, and increases the terrible responsibility of those who are able to lend a helping hand. Increase of knowledge demands increase of prayer. "The world for Jesus" is our motto; but how the world for Jesus if the church of Jesus does not wrestle in her prayers.

Dear brethren, do remember that the truth alone, if

not enforced by the Spirit of God, will not sink into the hearts of men. They say, "Truth is mighty, and will prevail;" but this is only half the case. If you put truth upon a shelf, and let the dust lie on her record, of what use will it be to men? Truth unknown, how can it enlighten? Truth not felt, how can it renew? There must therefore be the preacher to call attention to truth; but how shall they preach except they be sent? and how shall they be sent aright except in the power of the Holy Ghost? and how can we expect the Holy Ghost if we do not ask for his working? Wherefore, we pray you, wrestle together with us in your prayers, that the Holy Ghost may go forth with the truth and by the truth.

This will be to your profit. No man hears his pastor preach without deriving some benefit from him, if he has earnestly prayed for him. The best hearers, who get the most out of a man, are those who love him best, and pray most for him. God can make us dry wells to you if you offer no prayers for us. He can make us clouds that are full of rain, if you have pleaded with God on our behalf.

But the master argument with which we close is that which Paul mentions—"for Christ's sake." Oh, for God's sake, for his name and glory's sake, if you would honor the Father, if you would let Jesus see of the travail of his soul, wrestle together with us in your prayers for the divine working. It is so, brother, you know it is so, we are wholly dependent upon the Spirit of God. If it be so, that without God's blessing we can do nothing, and that God's blessing is given if we inquire of God for it, then I need not press you further—you will pray for me and for other preachers of the word. If your hearts

are right, you will each one resolve to offer special, continuous, and fervent prayer in private, and in your families, and in our holy convocations, and these shall deepen into an agony before God, and then a blessing shall be given us which we shall scarcely have room enough to receive. Lord, teach us to pray!

II.

RETROSPECT—"THE LORD HATH BLESSED."

"Forasmuch as the Lord hath blessed me hitherto."—JOSHUA xvii. 14.

IT is not an easy task to divide land amongst different claimants. Joshua divided Canaan with strict impartiality. He was a man of God, and he was also shrewdly wise, as you may gather from many of his speeches. But, for all that, he could not satisfy everybody. He who would please all attempts the impossible. God himself is quarrelled with. If it be the design of providence to please men, it is a melancholy failure. Do we not find men everywhere dissatisfied with their portions? This man would like his lot if it were not where it is, and that man would be perfectly satisfied if he had a little more. One would be contented with what he has if he could keep it always, while another would be more pleased if life could be shortened. There is no pleasing men. We are like the sons of Joseph in the chapter before us, ready to complain of our inheritance. It should not be so. We who have pined in the wilderness of sin should rejoice that we have entered the land of promise, and we ought to be glad to have a portion among the people of the Lord. Contentment should be natural to those who are born of the Spirit of God; yea, we ought to go beyond contentment, and cry, "Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits."

Brethren, the best advice that I can give to each

man among you is, that he should endeavor to make the best of the portion which God has given him: for, after all, *Joshua* had not arbitrarily appointed Ephraim and Manasseh their lots, but they had fallen to them by the decree of God. Their portions had been marked out by a higher hand than *Joshua*'s long before. You and I ought to believe that—

“There’s a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will.”

Let us fall back upon predestination, and accept the grand truth that “The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord.” An all-wise God disposes his people according to his sovereign will. Let us not seek to alter our destiny, but let us try to make the best of our circumstances. This is what *Joshua* exhorted Ephraim and Manasseh to do. “You have a hill country crowned with forests: hew them down. You have fat valleys occupied by Canaanites: drive out the present inhabitants.” O sirs, if we would but thoroughly enjoy what God has freely given us, we should be happy to the full, and even anticipate the joys of heaven. We have a deep river of delights in the covenant of grace, yet we are content to paddle about its shores. We are only up to our ankles, the most of us, whereas the waters are “waters to swim in.” A great sun of everlasting love shines upon the globe of our life with tropical force, but we get away to the North Pole of doubt and fear, and then complain that the sun has such little heat, or that he is so long below the horizon. He who will not go to the fire ought not to complain that the room is cold. Did we heartily feed upon what the Lord has set on our table, accept the ring which he has prepared for our finger,

and wear the garments which he has provided for our comfort, we might here on earth make music and dancing before the Lord.

I am going to speak upon my text thus: First, here is *a confession*, which I think many of us will be very happy to make: "Forasmuch as the Lord hath blessed me hitherto." Secondly, here is *an argument*, which is stated after the manner of logic: "Forasmuch as the Lord hath blessed me hitherto, therefore," so and so.

I. We look at our text, then, first of all, as a CONFES-
SION—"The Lord hath blessed me hitherto."

I will not at present speak to those of you upon whom the blessing of God has never rested. Remember, my dear hearers, that every man is either under the curse or under the blessing. They that are of the works of the law are under the curse. Those upon whom their sin is resting are under the curse, for a curse always attends upon sin. Though we read no commination service; though we do not speak to you from Ebal and Gerizim, with the blessing and the curse; yet rest assured that there is before the living God a separation of the precious from the vile, and each day there is a judgment which, in God's apprehension, puts some upon the right hand with the "Come, ye blessed," and others upon the left hand with the "Depart, ye cursed." This will be finally done in "that day of days for which all other days were made." At this hour, my hearer, if you are not the blessed of the Lord, you are resting under the dark shadow of a curse from which I pray God you may at once escape. Faith in him who was made a curse for us is the only way to the blessing.

But I speak to as many as have believed in the Lord

Jesus Christ, of whom the Lord saith, "Surely, blessing I will bless thee."

You can say at this time, "God hath blessed me *hitherto*." He has blessed you with those *blessings which are common to all the house of Israel*. Ephraim and Manasseh had received a blessing when God blessed Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, seeing they were in the loins of Abraham. You and I, who are in Christ, are partakers of all covenant blessings in Christ Jesus. "If children, then heirs;" and if we are children of God, then we are heirs of all things. I like to think of the old Scotchwoman, who not only blessed God for the porridge as she ate it, but thanked God that she had a covenant-right to the porridge. Daily mercies belong to the Lord's household by covenant-right; and that same covenant-right which will admit us into heaven above, also gives us bread and water here below. The trifles in the house, and the jewels of the house, equally belong to the children. We may partake of the common mercies of providence, and the extraordinary mercies of grace, without stint. None of the dainties of the royal house are locked up from the children. The Lord says to each believer, "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine." "Ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's," and therefore "all things are yours."

Can you not say—"The Lord hath blessed me *hitherto*"? Has he ever denied you one of the blessings common to the covenanted family? Has he ever told you that you may not pray, or that you may not trust? Has he forbidden you to cast your burden on the Lord? Has he denied to you fellowship with himself and communion with his dear Son? Has he laid an embargo on any one of the promises? Has he shut you

out from any one of the provisions of his love? I know that it is not so if you are his child, but you can heartily exclaim, "The Lord hath blessed me hitherto." "Such honor have all the saints." By his gracious past of love the Lord guarantees to his redeemed a future of equal blessedness, for his loving-kindness never departs from those on whom it lights.

But then, dear friends, besides this, Ephraim and Manasseh had *special blessings*, the peculiar blessing of Joseph, which did not belong to Judah, or Reuben, or Issachar. In the end of the Book of Genesis you will see how Jacob blessed the two sons of Joseph, and you will observe with what prodigality of benediction he enriched them amongst his sons. "Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall." Moses also, ere he died, seemed to glow with a divine fervor when he came to the tribe of Joseph, and blessed him in some respects above his brethren. Now I think that many of you may say, "Though I am least of all his saints, yet in some respects the Lord hath specially blessed me hitherto." I believe that every flower in a garden, which is tended by a wise gardener, could tell of some particular care that the gardener takes of it. He does for the dahlia what he does not for the sunflower; somewhat is wanted by the rose that is not required by the lily; and the geranium calls for an attention which is not given to the honeysuckle. Each flower wins from the gardener a special culture. The vine has a dressing all its own, and the apple-tree a pruning peculiar to itself. There is a blessing of the house of Manasseh, and a blessing of the house of Ephraim; and so is there a special benediction for each child of God. All the

names of the tribes were written on the breastplate, but there was a different color in the jewel allotted to each tribe; and I believe that there is a speciality of grace about every child of God. There is not only an election from the world, but an election out of the elect. Twelve were taken from the disciples; three were taken out of the twelve; one greatly beloved was taken out of the three. Uniformity of love does not prevent diversity of operations. As a crystal is made up of many crystals, so is grace composed of many graces. In one ray of the light of grace there are seven colors. Each saint may tell his fellow something that he does not know; and in heaven it will be a part of the riches of glory to hold commerce in those specialities which each one has for himself alone. I shall not be you, neither will you be me; neither shall we twain be like another two, or the four of us like any other four, though all of us shall be like our Lord when we shall see him as he is. I want you each to feel at this hour—“The Lord hath blessed *me* hitherto.” Personally, I often sit me down alone, and say, “Whence is this to me?” I cannot but admire the special goodness of my Lord to me. Sister, have you never done the same? Have you not said to yourself in deep humility, “Surely I have been a woman highly favored”? Do you not, my brother, often feel that the name given to Daniel might be given to you: “O man greatly beloved”? Perhaps you are greatly tried; but then, you have been graciously sustained. Perhaps you are free from troubles; then you are bound to bless the Lord for a smooth path. A peculiarity of love colors each gracious life. As God is truly everywhere, yet specially in certain places, so does he man-

ifest his love to all his people, and yet each one enjoys a speciality of grace. "The Lord hath blessed me hitherto."

"I think, besides this, that these two tribes which made up the house of Joseph, also meant to say that, not only had God blessed them with the common blessings of Israel, and the special blessing of their tribe, but also with *actual blessings*. As far as they had gone they had driven out the Canaanites, and taken possession of the country. They had not received all that was promised; but God had blessed them *hitherto*. Come, brethren, we have not driven out all the Canaanites yet, but we have driven out many of them. We are not what we hope to be, but we are not what we used to be. We cannot yet see everything clearly, but we are not blind, as once we were. We have not overcome every sinful propensity, but no sin has dominion over us, for we are not under the law, but under grace. We do not know all that the Lord will yet teach us, but what we do know we would not lose for ten thousand worlds. We have not seen our Lord as he is, but we have seen him; and the joy of that sight will never be taken from us. Therefore, before the Lord and his assembled people, we joyfully declare that "The Lord hath blessed us hitherto."

Let us expand this confession a little, and speak thus:

First, *all the blessings that we have received have come from God*. Do not let us trace any blessing to ourselves, or to our fellow-men; for though the minister of God may be as a conduit-pipe to bring us refreshing streams, yet all our fresh springs are in God, and not in men. Say, "*The Lord hath blessed me hitherto*." Trace up every stream to the fountain, every

beam to the sun, and say, "I will bless the Lord as long as I live, for *he* has blessed me. Every good gift which has come to me has come from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." Trite as the thought is, we have often to recall God's people to the confession—that all the blessings of the covenant come from the God of the covenant.

The Lord has given each one of us a great multitude of blessings. He has blessed us in his promises. Oh, that we did but know how rich we are! He has blessed us in his providence,—in the brightness and in the darkness of it, in its calms and in its storms, in its harvests and in its famines. He has blessed us by his grace. I shall not dwell upon these themes; I should want a century for my sermon, if I did. But he has blessed you, beloved, who are in Christ, with all heavenly blessings in Christ Jesus, according as he hath chosen you in him from before the foundation of the world. Never will you be able to reckon up, even in eternity, the total sum of the benedictions which God has bestowed upon you in promise, in providence, and in grace. He has given you "all blessings" in Christ, and that is the short way of putting it. He has given you more than you know of, more than you have asked for, more than you can estimate. He has given you not only many things, but all things, in Christ Jesus, and he has declared that "No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." The Lord hath, indeed, blessed us hitherto.

And, mark you, there has been a continuity of this blessing. God has not blessed us, and then paused; but he has blessed us "*hitherto*." One silver thread of blessing extends from the cradle to the grave. "He

hath blessed us hitherto.” When we have provoked him ; when we have backslidden from him ; when we have been making an ill use of his blessings ; yet he has kept on blessing us with a wondrous perseverance of love. I believe in the perseverance of the saints, because I believe in the perseverance of the love of God, or else I should not believe in it. The Lord himself puts it so—“I am God, I change not ; therefore, ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.” There is an unconquerable pertinacity in the love of God : his grace cannot be baffled or thwarted, or turned aside ; but his goodness and his mercy follow us all the days of our lives.

In addition to that continuity, there is a delightful consistency about the Lord’s dealings. “The Lord hath *blessed* us hitherto.” No curse has intervened. He has blessed us, and only blessed us. There has been no “yea” and “nay” with him ; no enriching us with spiritual blessings, and then casting us away. He has frowned upon us truly ; but his love has been the same in the frown as in the smile. He has chastened us sorely ; but he has never given us over unto death.

And what is more, when my text says, “The Lord hath blessed me hitherto,” there is a kind of prophecy in it, for “hitherto” has a window forward as well as backward. You sometimes see a railway carriage or truck, fastened on to what goes before ; but there is also a great hook behind. What is that for ? Why, to fasten something else behind, and so to lengthen the train. Any one mercy from God is linked on to all the mercy that went before it ; but provision is also made for adding future blessing. All the years to come are guaranteed by the ages past. Did you ever

notice how the Bible ends? It closes with that happiest of conclusions, marriage and happiness. The marriage of the Lamb is come, and his bride hath made herself ready. Infinite felicity closes the volume of revealed history. Earthquakes, and falling stars, and the pouring out of vials, follow with terrible speed; but it all ends in everlasting bliss and eternal union. Even thus shall it be with us, for the Lord hath blessed us hitherto.

Hitherto—*hitherto*—he has blessed us; and it implies that he always will bless us. Never will the silver stream of his love cease to flow. Never will the ocean of his grace cease to wash the shores of our life. He is, he must be, to his people the blessed and blessing God. "Surely blessing I will bless thee," is a word of Jehovah that stands fast for ever and ever. Thus far is our confession of gratitude.

II. Now we come to THE ARGUMENT, which I wish to press home upon all my dear brethren and sisters in Christ. The tribe of Joseph says, "Forasmuch as the Lord hath blessed me hitherto."

What is the inference from that fact? The argument that the sons of Joseph wanted to draw was peculiarly Jewish; it was the inference of business. It was the plea that they should have more because they had so much: because they had one lot, therefore they were to have two portions in the promised land. I want no man to infer that, because God has blessed him in providence, he is to expect to have still more riches, and still more pleasure. Ah, no! Do not wish to have your portion in this life, lest you get it; for then you will be as the ungodly.

Their argument, again, was one of grumbling. They said, "God has blessed us hitherto;" as much as to say,

"If we do not get two portions, we shall not say that God is still blessing us ; but we will draw a line, and say *hitherto*." God has many very naughty children ; they fall into quarrels with their heavenly Father. "Ever since that dear child died," says one, "I never felt the same towards God." "Ever since my mother was taken away," cries another, "I have always felt that I could not trust God as I used to do." This is shocking talk. Have done with it. If you quarrel with God, he will say to you, "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." There is no happiness but in complete submission. Yield, and all will end well ; but if you stand out against the Most High, it is not God's rod that makes you smart ; it is a rod of your own making. End this warfare by saying, "It is the Lord ; let him do what seemeth him good." Do not say, "He blessed me up to a certain point, and then he changed his hand." This is a most slanderous falsehood.

Let us say rather, "The Lord has blessed me hitherto, and this is cause for *holy wonder* and amazement. Why should the Lord have blessed me?"

"Pause, my soul ! Adore and wonder !
 Ask, 'Oh, why such love to me?' ,
 Grace hath put me in the number
 Of the Saviour's family :
 Hallelujah !
 Thanks, eternal thanks to Thee."

We read in 2 Samuel vii. 18, 19, "Then went king David in, and sat before the Lord, and he said, Who am I, O Lord God ? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto ? And is this the manner of man, O Lord God ?" Thus let each one of us be amazed at the great loving-kindness of the Lord.

Be full of *holy gratitude*. Do not say, "I will look on the bright side." Beloved, the Lord's ways to us are all bright. Do not say, "I will trust God where I cannot trace him," but rather trace God everywhere. Get into the state of that poor man who was so greatly blessed to pious Tauler. He wished the man a good day. The man replied, "Sir, I never had a bad day." "Oh, but I wish you good weather." Said he, "Sir, it is always good weather. If it rains or if it shines, it is such weather as God pleases, and what pleases God pleases me."

Our sorrows lie mainly at the roots of our selfishness, and when our self-hood is dug up, our sorrow to a great extent is gone. Let us, then, utter this text to-night, "Forasmuch as the Lord hath blessed me hitherto," with hearty gratitude for all his holy will. Summing up gains and losses, joys and griefs, let us say with Job, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, and blessed be the name of the Lord."

Say also, with *holy confidence*, "The Lord hath blessed me hitherto." Speak as you find. If any inquire, "What has God been to you?" answer, "He hath blessed me hitherto." The devil whispers, "If thou be the son of God;" and he then insinuates, "God deals very hardly with you. See what you suffer. See how you are left in the dark!" Answer him, "Get thee behind me, Satan, for surely goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life; and if God takes from me any earthly good, shall I receive good at the hand of the Lord, and shall I not receive evil?" He who can stand to this stands on good ground. "In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly." But he that gets away from this drifts I know not where. Come, let us each one bless

the Lord, and say, "If he should treat me hardly in the future, I will still praise him for what he has done hitherto." I remember saying to myself, when I was in sorrow for sin, that if God would only forgive me my sin, and give me rest from my despair, if I had to live in a dungeon on bread and water, all the rest of my life, I would do nothing else but sing to his praise." I am afraid that I have not fulfilled that promise; but I confess my wrong in not having done so. You, my brethren, I dare say, made much the same spiritual covenant with God, and you have not stood to it. Let us unite our sincere confessions, and say, each one, "The Lord hath blessed me hitherto; therefore blessed be his name."

Furthermore, if this be true, let us resolve to *engage in enlarged enterprises*. If the Lord hath blessed us hitherto, why should he not bless us in something fresh? I want to say somewhat to you as a church, dear friends, for the text is a church-text, and the "me" here comprehends all the tribe of Joseph. Let us joyfully say as a church, "The Lord hath blessed us hitherto." Strangers will excuse us if we have a little mutual joy in what the Lord has done for us during a considerable period of time. Those who have been with me from our earliest days, when we were a mere handful of people, may well rejoice that the Lord taught us to pray, and to trust, when we were so few and feeble, and then he visited us with favor, and greatly multiplied us; and since then he has continued to bless us without pause or stint. These thirty-three years he has been with us, we have never been without conversions, never without fresh labor for Christ, and fresh projects, and never a failure, never a schism, or a division of heart. I am

amazed and humbled by the Lord's goodness. We have gone from strength to strength in the Lord's work. I have been feeble, and I fear I may be so still; but the Lord has not ceased to work by you who are with me. Well, what then? College, Orphanage, Colportage, Evangelists, Mission Halls—thirty-four of them, Sunday-schools, and so forth. What then? "Stop," says the devil. You would like us to stop, would you not, foul fiend? But we shall do nothing of the kind. Wherever you are, O fiend, in this city, it is our business and our desire to fight with you, and drive you out! We cannot cease to be active; for the Lord has blessed us hitherto. "You will get meddling with too much, and get too many irons in the fire." None of them in *your* fire, O Satan! Brethren, we must have more fire, and more irons in it! I beseech you, do not slacken in any way, but press on. Let us do more. Have I an alabaster-box anywhere? Is it lying by? Perhaps the odors may begin to ooze out. It is not safe in the drawer. It may get cracked and broken. Let me have the privilege of breaking it myself, and pouring it on my Master's feet, that I may anoint them with the most precious thing I have. Can you not think of something you could do for Jesus, each one of you personally? Cannot the whole church say to itself, "We must keep our institutions going at a greater rate for Christ's sake"? The world is very dark, and wants more light; the poor are very hungry, and need bread; and the ignorant are very faint to know more.

Did you say, "Now do not project anything"? I do not know that I shall, but at the same time, I am not sure that I shall not. If the Lord has blessed us hitherto, let us go a little further. When certain

brethren raise a stone of Ebenezer, they sit down on it. That is not what the stone is meant for. I have a commission to put spikes on the top of those stones. You must not dream of sitting down upon,—“Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.” The voice from the throne saith, “Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward.” Though the sea roll before you, forward! Forward, in God’s name! Amen.

III.

THE SERMON OF THE SEASONS.

March 14, 1886.

“While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.”—GENESIS viii. 22.

OUR Saviour constantly taught the people by parables, and I think he would have his ministers do the same. The condition of things just now, both as to weather and business, furnishes a very plain and instructive parable which it would not be wise to pass over. Every morning when we wake we hope for a change of wind, a glimpse of the sun, and the end of the frost; but still we moan with the poet—

“ Oh, the long and dreary Winter !
Oh, the cold and cruel Winter !”

We say to ourselves, Will spring-time never come? In addition to this, trade and commerce continue in a state of stagnation; crowds are out of employment, and where business is carried on, it yields little profit. Our watchmen are asked if they discern any signs of returning day, and they answer, “No.” Thus we bow our heads in a common affliction, and ask each man comfort of his fellow; for as yet we see not our signs, neither does the eastern sky grow gray with the hopeful light of the long-expected morning. Having faith in God we faint not, but believe that a lesson of love for us is written by his hand in these black char-

acters. Let us spell it out with childlike confidence.

Our text takes us back to the time when the waters of the flood had just assuaged, and God opened the door of the ark and bade Noah and his family come forth into a new world. For a time there had been a confusion: the seasons were mixed up, the perpetual downpour of the rain had almost turned day into night; and whether it was summer or winter could scarcely be told. The frame of nature seemed to be out of joint, her order suspended. And now the Lord, in making a promise to Noah that he would never destroy the earth again with a flood, also declares that while the earth remaineth there shall be no more of the confusion of the seasons and mingling of day and night which had brought such destruction upon all living things. As there should be no more a general deluge, so should there be no more a serious disarrangement of the course of the seasons and the temperature appropriate thereto. Seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, are to succeed each other in their perpetually unchanging change, so long as the present reign of forbearance shall last. Till comes the close of time, the rolling year, made up of alternate day and night, shall pass through cold and heat in due order. We are grateful to God for thus settling in his mind that so it shall be. We are at ease because we know that he will not lift his hand again to destroy every living thing with a flood of water. He will deal with men in longsuffering, and tender mercy, and forbearance. He will not use the stern weapons of destruction, but will try the tender ministrations of patience and grace, that men may be led to repentance. There will come an end to this dispensation; but while the reign of for-

bearance lasts, nature shall keep her appointed marches, and we need not fear a disorderly rush or a destructive chaos. "Four seasons fill the measure of the year." In their mysterious round they come and go, and all combined display a moving harmony of wise design most glorifying to our God. Fear not in the day of tempest, for the rain shall not deluge the earth. The Lord setteth his bow in the cloud as the ensign of his covenant with mankind. Fear not in the black midnight: God will rekindle the lamp of day, and chase away the darkness.

It is very singular that when the Lord thus ushers in the reign of forbearance he gives as his reason the following statement: "I will not curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." This is very singular, because this seems to have been the powerful reason why the Lord had already destroyed the guilty race from off the face of the earth. In the fifth and sixth verses of the sixth chapter we read: "God saw the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart." Here we have almost the same words. Can the reason for judgment become the argument for mercy? Assuredly it can. God who changeth not absolutely, yet changeth his hand in his dealing with men. He had left them to themselves and permitted them to live through centuries; but the longer they lived, the more wicked they grew, until sin reached to a horrible degree of infamy. Man becomes a bad enough sinner when he lives to be seventy; but what he became at seven hundred or more it is somewhat difficult to

guess. We wonder not that there were giants in those days—giants in crime as well as in stature. The Lord saw that however long man lived he only grew a greater adept in sin, for the imagination of his heart remained evil, and even grew to an intolerable height of iniquity; and therefore he said that he would destroy the race and begin anew. But when the Lord looked down upon those whom he had spared, who were to be the parents of a new race, he saw that in them also there was the same fountain of evil, and that their hearts also yielded evil desires and devices continually. Then he resolved to shorten the life of man so that no individuals might ever arrive at so horrible a ripeness and cleverness of iniquity; but at the same time he said: "I will bear with them. I have dealt sternly with them, but they do not change; the few whom I have snatched from a watery grave are still inclined to sin. This dreadful expedient has not washed away the rebellious tendencies of the human heart. Therefore I will deal leniently and gently with them, manifesting a long forbearance, that man may have space for repentance. I will no more destroy every living thing, because destruction itself does not avail to banish sin." Thus it seems by no means difficult to see how that which to divine holiness was a reason for judgment, may be used by divine pity as a reason for mercy.

But what, think you, could have made the reasoning assume this new form? I attribute it to one thing never to be forgotten. Read the verse which precedes our text: "And Noah builded an altar unto the Lord; and took of every clean beast and of every clean fowl and offered burnt offerings on the altar; and the Lord smelled a sweet savor." The sacrifice is

the turning-point. Without a sacrifice sin clamors for vengeance, and God sends a destroying flood; but the sacrifice presented by Noah was typical of the coming sacrifice of God's only begotten Son, and of the effectual atonement therein provided for human sin. The very shadow of the one great propitiation changed the state of the world. Now the Lord pleads with himself for grace as once he argued for doom. He speaketh of course after the manner of men; it is only to our apprehension that these things are so, for Jehovah changeth not, and he is always love and wisdom. For the sake of the sacrifice God resolves to bear with man, as one who is incurably unwise, or desperately sick. He determines to look upon the evil tendency of man's imagination rather as an inveterate disease than as an unbearable provocation. He deals very patiently with the race, and no more sweeps it away in his wrath. See what the Lord will do when a sacrifice is provided! Methinks I hear him say of the earth, "Deliver it from flood, and bid the seasons keep their round of beneficence; for I have found a ransom."

I. Thus I introduce to you the text, and I would have you notice, dear friends, that in that text there is first of all a hint, A SOLEMN HINT, OF WARNING. It begins thus: "While the earth remaineth." I hear a sound in the bowels of the text like subterranean thunder. The voice of the text is a voice of mercy, but there is an undertone of "terrible things in righteousness." "While the earth remaineth" implies that *the earth will not always remain*. There is an end appointed of the Most High, and it will surely come: then the seasons will melt into the endless age, and time shall be promoted into eternity. The earth hath

remained now century after century; alas! it has but little changed towards God. The whole world still lieth in the wicked one; darkness covers the earth, and gross darkness the nations. Jehovah hath a people, "a remnant according to the election of grace," and for their sakes the earth remaineth yet a little while; but its end draweth nearer every hour. "God hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man Christ Jesus." An hour is set when mercy shall no longer hold back the axe from the barren tree, and forbearance shall no more restrain the angel with the sharp sickle from reaping the vintage of the earth. Love now journeys to and fro among the sons of men, with the voice of trembling pathos, pleading with them to be reconciled to God; but her mission will come to an end, the day of grace will be over, and the reign of judgment will come. Let us not reckon too much upon this world's enduring even for a little while; let us not set our love upon anything that is upon it; for here we have no continuing city. "The things which are seen are temporal;" the world therefore shall pass away, and all the works that are therein shall be burned up: even "The elements shall melt with fervent heat." There is a day coming when floods of fire shall be let loose: they shall fall from above, and burst upward from below, and all material things shall be melted in one common conflagration. Poor world! thou, too, art surely doomed! God is gracious to thee, but thou art as a wreck drifting upon the rocks, or as a tree waiting for the axe. Believers in the testimony of God can joyfully say, "We, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness:" therefore we are not dismayed.

I would have you notice again, dear friends, that *the time when the earth shall no longer remain is not mentioned*. The warning is left indefinite as to time, though definite enough as to fact. The expression, "While the earth remains," is proof enough that it will remain only for a season; but it is dumb as the tongue of death as to the date when that season shall close. "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now;" but when the hour of her deliverance shall come the best instructed cannot tell. Do not attempt to prophesy, and especially do not venture upon dates. "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father hath put in his own power." "Of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only." The uncertainty of the end of all things is intended to keep us continually on the watch. We are to remain upon the tiptoe of expectation, and never to dream that we can reckon upon a certain length of time before the great and terrible day of the Lord. If you knew when Christ would come you might be tempted to spend the interval in neglect and wantonness; but as it is written, "In such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh," it is the Lord's intent that you should stand with your loins girt and your lamps trimmed, waiting for the midnight cry, "Behold he cometh."

Let me further remark that *the day when the remaining of the earth shall cease cannot be very far off*; for according to the Hebrew, which you have in the margin of your Bibles, the text runs thus: "As yet all the days of the earth, seedtime and harvest shall not cease." The "while" of the earth's remaining is counted by days; not even months or years are men-

tioned, much less centuries. The earth seems gray with age to us, but in the language of inspiration the present stage of its history is reckoned by days. There will one day come a last day, and let us not reckon that the time is distant, for Peter saith, "The end of all things is at hand;" and he adds, "Be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer." "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness." One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. If geologists speak correctly concerning the history of the world, it has lasted many myriads of years already, and passed through many periods before it came to that which is described in the first chapter of Genesis. The era of man is that which God describes to us by the inspired penman; and we are led to believe that this era will be a very short one. From the day when God fitted up his earth for the abode of man, to the time when he shall consume it with fervent heat, there will be comparatively a very short space of time. God lives by millions of years; therefore, a few thousand years to him are but as a watch in the night. Let it be thus far understood by us that this dispensation is not to be a protracted one, and that the duration of the world in its present state is to be exceedingly brief as compared with preceding and succeeding ages. The life of this present evil world is but a span; it also is of few days and full of trouble. But I must also add that the era of sin and grace is crowded with marvellous manifestations of the glory of God in infinite love and mercy.

II. Thus, then, there is a hint of warning in our text; but secondly, there is A SENTENCE OF PROMISE, rich and full of meaning: "While the earth remaineth, seed-

time and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer, day and night shall not cease." It is a promise concerning temporal things, but yet it breathes a spiritual air, and hath about it the smell of a field that the Lord hath blessed.

This promise has been kept. It is long since it was written, it is longer still since it was resolved upon in the mind of God ; but it has never failed. There have been times when cold has threatened to bind the whole year in the chains of frost ; but genial warmth has pushed it aside. Seedtime and harvest have been threatened, but they have come ; the harvest may not have been abundant, but yet there has been a harvest sufficient to sustain the race. Days have been dark, and hardly discernible from night, like the gloom of Egypt's plague ; but still, taking things as a whole, day and night have divided time between them. The ordinances of heaven have continued with us as with our fathers. No student of nature can doubt that to this hour, despite occasional extremes of heat and cold, the seasons are unchanged ; and notwithstanding occasional absence of sunshine, and diminution of light, day and night have followed the diurnal revolution of the earth. Since the fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were. One great interruption occurred at the deluge, but the Lord has kept his promise to prevent any other.

So long-continued is the fulfilment of this promise, that *even this race of unbelievers has come to believe in it.* We look for the seasons as a matter of course. I do not suppose that any one in this audience doubts the coming of spring. The boughs are bare, the buds are not eager for their bursting, the crocus and the daffodil are afraid to show themselves ; but yet the birds

believe in the coming spring, for I hear them in sweet chorus every morning singing their songs of expectancy. Men and brethren, you are expectant also. Long observation has begotten in you an unwavering faith. When the sun goes down at night, not even a little child fears that God has blown out the sun, and that the great candle will never be lighted again. No, we look for the morning. When winter has chilled us a while, we look for the spring and the summer; and when summer has browned our faces, we expect the falling of the leaf and the descent of the snow. I want you to ask yourselves—Why do we not believe God's other promises? Why have we not as solid a conviction of the truth of other statements which our God has made as we have upon this point? Is it that we have experience in this case? O brethren, we have had experience concerning other matters also. If we were to deal with the weather with the same shortsighted doubt which governs us in our thoughts of divine providence, we might be doubtful about summer and winter. We might say, "It really does not look very likely that spring will come. Look at our meadows, and mark how the cold has literally burned the grass; see how our hardy evergreens are many of them dead, and others sadly cut to pieces; see what mischief the cold has wrought. Will there ever be leaf and flower again? Is it possible that I shall ever wipe the sweat from my smoking brow on some blazing noontide? Can these frozen brooks leap into liberty? To-day we crowd around the fire, hardly keeping ourselves alive from the bitter cold; shall we yet bask in the hay-field, or fan ourselves amid the golden sheaves?" Had we less experience, it would seem highly improbable. Yet we enjoy a full assurance as to

the revolution of the seasons and the succession of day and night ; do we not? Why this assurance of one promise, and why such frequent distrusts of others equally true?

When God's promises appear to be difficult of fulfilment, wherefore do we doubt them? They are fulfilled in due season; which of them has ever failed? They come to pass without difficulty; why should we suspect them? When deliverance looks as though it could not come, it is none the less sure; for the Lord has promised it. The absence of visible means need not enter into the account; he who is Almighty God has infinite resources.

So, too, dear friends, we have to recollect, that if the Lord himself does not send spring and summer we cannot create either of them. Here we are out of the field. When the sun goes down, if the Lord did not cause it to rise again, we could not open the doors of a morning. I love to get into the field of nature on a large scale, for there one is quit of man, and the Lord alone is seen working all things according to his will. The heavens and their ordinances know no presence and power but God alone. As far as we are concerned, we cannot lift a finger to change the seasons. What could all our Parliament—Kings, Lords, and Commons—do with all their Acts towards bringing on spring-tide or hastening summer and harvest? Nothing at all. These matters are out of man's power; and yet they are none the less sure. So, my brethren, when you get into such a condition that you can by no means help yourself, you are not, therefore, to doubt that God can achieve his purpose and fulfil his promise without your help. When hath he asked your aid? Good men have gone very wrong when they have

thought of aiding in the fulfilment of promises and prophecies. See how Rebecca erred in trying to get the promised blessing for Jacob. We had better leave the Lord's decrees in the Lord's hands. When any case comes to its worst, and you can do nothing whatever in it, you may safely stand still and see the salvation of God. At this hour you feel sure that springtime and summer will come, though you cannot move the sun an inch beyond his predestinated course; be as much at ease about the other promises of God as you are concerning the cycle of the year.

Remember, also, that every coming of summer—yes, and every rising of the sun—is a great wonder. Only our familiarity leads us to think of these things without marvelling. A real miracle is every break of day and every set of sun. A world of wonders bursts forth in every spring-tide; each blade of grass and ear of corn is a display of divine omnipotence. We are surrounded with works of almighty power and goodness from morn till eve and through the watches of the night; from the first day of the year until its close the Lord is about us. Unseen by us, his hand propels the silent spheres which no force within human calculation could move in their orbits; that same power sustains and animates and perfects all things. God is in all, and in all wonderful. If God continues thus to work the pleasing changes of the year as he promised to do, why do you doubt him concerning other things, O ye of little faith? Will he not keep his word to his children if he keeps it to the earth? Will he not fulfil his every promise to his own elect if he is true to the sun and stars? Seedtime and harvest, summer and winter, have come according to his word without our aid, and, wonderful as these changes are, they

have never failed; and will the Lord forget in other things? Will he forswear his covenant and deny his promise to his Only Begotten? God forbid.

Brethren, we have come not only to believe this promise as to the seasons and to make quite sure about it, but *we practically act upon our faith*. The farmers have sown their autumn wheat, and many of them are longing for an opportunity to sow their spring wheat: but what is sowing but a burial of good store? Why do husbandmen hide their grain in the earth? Because they feel sure that seedtime will in due time be followed by harvest. They put their grain into the ground hoping to receive it again multiplied a hundredfold. Why do we not act in an equally practical style in reference to the rest of God's promises? True faith makes the promises of God to be of full effect by viewing them as true and putting them to the test. When faith asks of God, it believes that it has the petition which it has asked of him. Many prepare their thinner garments in prospect of warm weather, or at the close of summer provide household flannels for the winter, because they reckon upon the season: why do we not also prepare ourselves to receive the Lord's blessing in the time appointed? Why do we not reckon upon every word of Scripture being fulfilled? We ought to take the promises into our matter-of-fact estimate, and act accordingly.

Let me go further:—*If a man did not act upon the declaration of God in our text he would be counted foolish*. Suppose a man said, "I do not feel sure that there will come a harvest, and therefore I shall not sow;" his neighbors would look upon his uncultivated fields, and reckon him out of his mind. If another should say, "I shall lay by no stores for the winter, because I

believe that we have arrived at perpetual summer, wherein there will always be corn in the sheaf and fruit on the trees," we should regard him as fit for a lunatic-asylum. Equally mad are they who treat other promises of God as if they were idle words, no more worthy of notice than the prophecies of a charlatan. The masses of our fellow-men never search the Word of God to find a promise suitable to their cases, and even if such a promise were laid before them, they would only regard it as a matter of imagination or meaningless jargon. What shall I say of those who thus trifle with eternal verities, but that madness has carried away the heart of man? What God has promised ought to be a clear indication to us of the future, and a hint as to how we should act. Let us act in faith upon the divine promise. If the Lord says, "Seek ye my face," take care that you do seek his face. If he says, "Ask, and it shall be given you," be sure to ask and expect to receive. If the Lord promises pardon to those who believe on his Son, let us believe on his Son, and receive mercy. He keeps his covenant with day and night; let us, therefore, believe that he will keep covenant with us, and do even as he hath said. Oh that this lesson, simple as it is, may be learnt by every believer, and by every unbeliever too!

Let me close this point by noticing that, *whether men believed this or not it will stand true*. A man says there will be no winter, and provides no garments; he will shiver in the northern blast all the same when December covers the earth with snow. An unbeliever declares that there will be no summer, and therefore he will not sow nor prepare a barn. Will his foolish scepticism prevent the coming of harvest? Miserable

farmer that he is! He will secure a harvest of thorns and thistles to reward his own practical unbelief, but a harvest will come to the rest of the land, to his confusion. The year will go on, whoever plays the fool; so, too, will the sun arise, whoever prophesies an endless night. God's purpose and God's promise will stand fast though the hills be removed. If you believe in the Lord Jesus, you shall be saved, but if you believe not, you must perish: in either case, the law will not alter for you. God's great laws in the spiritual world hold good with a certainty as great as those which govern the natural world. We cannot suspend the force of gravitation; and if we could, we should not even then be able to change the veracity of the Most High, who must be true so long as he is God. Hath he said and shall he not do it? Ay, that he shall. Though we believe not, he abideth faithful; he cannot deny himself; therefore, ye sons of men, be wise, and take heed to the word of the Lord. As in the summer ye prepare yourselves for winter; and as at spring-tide ye sow your seed that ye may gather your harvest in the summer, and thus ye obey the voice of God in nature, I pray you also have respect to that voice as it speaks in the pages of his Book, and shape your conduct by that which the Lord has revealed.

III. There is also in the text, I think, a SUGGESTION OF ANALOGIES. Reading these words, not as a philosophical prediction, but as a part of the Word of God, I see in them a moral, spiritual, and mystical meaning. Holy Scripture is intended not to teach us natural but spiritual things: I conclude, therefore, that there is an analogy here well worthy of being worked out. May the good Spirit guide us therein!

While the earth remaineth *there will be changes in the spiritual world.* Read the text laying a stress upon the words of change, and see how it rises and falls like the waves of the sea: "While the earth remaineth, *seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.*" No one of these states continues; it comes and goes. The seasons are a perpetual procession, an endless chain, an ever-moving wheel. Cold flies before heat, and anon summer is chased away by winter. Nothing is stable. Such is this life: such are the feelings of spiritual life with most men: such is the history of the church of God. We sorrow and we rejoice: we struggle and we triumph: we labor and we rest. We are not long upon Tabor, neither are we always in the valley of Baca. Let us not be amazed, as though some strange thing happened to us, if our day darkens into night, or our summer chills into winter. From joy to sorrow, from sorrow to joy, from success to defeat, from defeat to success, we pass very rapidly. It is so: it will be so while the earth remaineth, and we remain partakers of the earth,

Yet, *there will be an order in it all.* Cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, do not come in a giddy dance or tumultuous hurly-burly; but they make up the fair and beautiful year. Chance has no part in these affairs. God compelleth winds and storms, and sun and sea, to keep the order of his house, and none rebelleth against his commandment. So in the spiritual kingdom, in the life of the believer, and in the history of the church of God, all things are made to work for good, and the spiritual is being educated into the heavenly. In our seasons there is an order visible to God, even when we walk in darkness

and see no light. We have our winters, in which the sap is prepared in secret to produce the clusters of summer; we have our colds, in which we lose the superfluities bred of our heat. Expect the changes, and believe that they come by rule.

Great rules will stand while the earth abideth, in the spiritual as well as in the natural world. For instance, there will be seedtime and harvest, effort and result, labor and success. There will be to you, dear brother, a time in which you will chiefly have to receive; it is your seedtime, and God is sowing you by instruction and sanctification, in order that in due time you may yield him a harvest to his glory. Sometimes we lie passive, like the ploughed fields, and then our divine Sower casts into us the living seed; but soon other days arrive, when we are active, and yield unto God the results of his grace experienced in former days. It ought to be so. To you, beloved workers in the Mission-hall, or the Sunday-school, there will be a time of sowing; not much may be accomplished, though a great deal of effort may be put forth. To me in preaching there are times for sowing, and nothing else but sowing; few seem to be the green blades which spring up around me. Perhaps a year may intervene before the worker shall see any reward for his toil: "The husbandman waiteth for the precious fruits of the earth." The missionary upon his district, the Bible-woman on her round, may see no manifest effect produced by daily teaching; but harvest and seedtime are tied together in a sure knot. "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." Brethren, believe that, and be of good cheer. "Your labor is not in vain in the Lord."

While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest will take each one its turn.

So, too, while the earth remaineth there will be the interchanges of cold and heat. Where there is life there must be change; only in death is there monotony. There will be times in your experience when you will feel the awful withering of that convincing Spirit who dries up the glory of the flesh. "Who can stand before his cold?" Anon there will be a melting season of contrition and repentance, and then the Holy Spirit will have warmed your heart into hope and faith and love and joy and delight in God. Cold and heat come to the church. I have noticed oftentimes her bitter cold, and I have cried to God about it. But the heat has come; we have felt the glow of revival; enthusiasm has been kindled, zeal has abounded. I wish we could always keep at one glorious summer heat, walking in the light as God is in the light. It ought to be so with us. Some of us labor to be always zealous and full of fire; but should times come when we or others are not in the fulness of the blessing, we will not despair; but we will the rather cry mightily unto the Lord to send his Word and cause the waters of his grace to flow, and make our winter to be over and gone, while flowers appear on the earth and the time of the singing of birds comes on.

So, too, have I seen in our mortal life summer and winter, prosperity and adversity. Do not expect, dear brother, while you are in this world, always to dwell among the lilies and roses of prosperity. Summer will come, and you will be wise to make hay while the sun shines by using all opportunities for usefulness; but look for winter. I do not know into what trade you can enter to be secure against losses, nor what

profession you could follow in which you would escape disappointments. I know no corner of the earth without its night, no land without its stones, no sea without its storms. As to spiritual and mental experience, it seemeth to me within myself that while the earth remaineth I shall have my ebbs and flows, my risings and my sinkings. Do not therefore begin to kick and quarrel with the dispensations of God's providence. When it is summer-time say, "The Lord gave, and blessed be his name." When it is winter say, "The Lord hath taken away, and blessed be his name." Keep to the same music, even though you sometimes have to pitch an octave lower. Still praise and magnify the Lord whether you be sowing or reaping. Let him do what seemeth him good, but to you let it always seem good to praise.

Beloved, labor will be followed by rest; for while the earth remaineth there will be day and night. In the day man goeth forth to his labor; at night he lieth down. Let him bless God for both. There cometh a night wherein no man can work: to us this is not dreaded, but expected. I do not know for which I thank God most, for day or for night. Our young people praise God for day, with its activities; but we who are older are more inclined to bless the Lord for night, with its repose. The gray beard, the man of many years and sad experiences, looks forward to that night wherein the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest. If we regard death as night, we look forward to an endless day, which will follow on, when the sun shall go no more down forever. Jesus our Lord is the Sun of that glorious country to which we wend our way. While the earth remaineth, there will continually be a variety of benedictions, a change-

ringing upon the silver bells of mercy. When thou art on high, my brother, remember thou must descend; and when thou art cast down, expect a cheerful lifting up. When it is broad day, let us travel swiftly, for night comes on; but when it is dark, let us watch hopefully, for the morning cometh. As sojourners in a changeful country, let us spend the days of our pilgrimage in a holy fear, which shall preserve us from the love of the world. I need not further work out the analogies of the text; many more will rise before the meditative mind.

IV. Last of all, I want you to regard my text as A TOKEN FOR THE ASSURANCE OF OUR FAITH. "While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease." And they do not. In this fact we are bidden to see the seal and token of the covenant. Look at the passage we read this morning in the thirty-third chapter of Jeremiah. Here is *the security of the King in whom we rejoice*. "If ye can break my covenant of the day and my covenant of the night, then shall David not have a son to reign upon his throne." God hath promised never to change the royal line: but while the earth remaineth, and day and night are seen, the Son of David shall reign King of kings and Lord of lords. Until all enemies are under his feet he must reign. So, then, as I wrap my garment about me, feeling the cold of winter, I will say to myself, "God hath, by sending cold, confirmed his covenant with Jesus our Lord and King." Every morning light saluteth my eyes, and declareth that "his name shall be continued as long as the sun;" and when the shades of evening fall, and the stars look forth from their houses, I hear a sound of "abund-

ance of peace so long as the moon endureth." His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and of his kingdom there is no end. The Lord Jesus is King in Zion, and head over all things to his church while the earth remaineth.

The abiding of the ordinances of heaven is equally a token of *the continuance of the priesthood*. Under the type of the tribe of Levi the priesthood is vested in the person of our Lord. He is our Melchizedek, who is priest as well as king, and of his priesthood there is no end. While winter chills and summer burns, while day calls to labor and night to rest, our great High-priest abides in his office, still able to cleanse us, to make intercession for us, and to present our offerings unto God. His one sacrifice is perpetually a sweet savor unto God, and shall be till moons shall wax and wane no more. As I tread the soil which seems frozen into iron, and as I shiver in the bitter north-east wind, I say to myself, "The priesthood of our Lord abides; for cold has not ceased to visit us, and heat will come in its appointed months." As I go to my bed, or as I rise from it, day and night are to me a pledge that the Lord Jesus is a priest for ever according to the law of an endless life.

A third thing was also assured by the same token. The Lord said that as long as his covenant with day and night remained *he would not put away the seed of Abraham*. Since a son of David must rule them, they must exist to be ruled. There will for ever be a chosen people—a people for whom Jesus lives as king and priest. The Lord hath not cast away the people whom he did foreknow, nor will he do so, come what may. While seedtime and harvest, cold and heat abide, the Lord will maintain a church, against which the gates

of hell shall not prevail. What a mercy is this! Alas! men whom I hoped were faithful have turned aside from the truth; ministers who were regarded as pillars have fallen, and persons esteemed to be saints turned out to be hypocrites; yet "there is a remnant according to the election of grace." The Lord hath a reserve of men who have not bowed the knee to Baal. Therefore let us be of good courage and never tremble for the ark of the Lord.

To end all, let our prayer be that the Lord would abide with us, and then the heat shall not smite us, nor the cold molest us. The presence of God makes fair weather. Let us sing with quaint John Ryland—

"Rise then, Sun of righteousness,
Me with thy sweet beamings bless;
Winter then may stay or flee,
Lord, 'tis all alike to me."

Oh, you that know not our God, I feel heartily sorry for you! To you all seasons must be blank, for God is not in them. Oh that you knew Jesus. The world is a bleak house, a chill and empty corridor without God; and men are orphans, and life is hopeless, and death is starless night, if Jesus is not known and loved. He who trusts his soul with Jesus has found the key of the great secret, the clue of the maze. Henceforth he shall see, in all that smiles or rages around him in our changeful weather, pledges of the love of the Father, tokens of the grace of the Son, and witnesses of the work of the Holy Ghost. To the one God be glory for ever! Amen.

IV.

WHY THEY LEAVE US.

March 21, 1886.

“Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.”—JOHN xvii. 24.

THE prayer of the Saviour rises as it proceeds. He asked for his people that they might be preserved from the world, then that they might be sanctified, and then that they might be made manifestly one: and now he reaches his crowning point—that they may be with him where he is, and behold his glory. It is well when in prayer the spirit takes to itself wings. The prayer that swings to and fro like a door upon its hinges may admit to fellowship; but that prayer is more after the divine pattern which, like a ladder, rises round by round, until it loses itself in heaven.

This last step of our Lord's prayer is not only above all the rest, but it is a longer step than any of the others. He here ascends, not from one blessing which may be enjoyed on earth, to another of higher degree; but he mounts right away from all that is of this present state into that which is reserved for the eternal future. He quits the highest peaks of grace, and at a single stride his prayer sets its foot in glory: “That they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am.”

There is this to be noticed also concerning this di-

vine prayer, that not only does it rise as to its subject, but it even ascends as to the place which the Intercessor appears to occupy. Has it not been so with yourselves in prayer at times, that you have hardly known where you were? You might have cried with Paul, "Whether in the body or out of the body, I cannot tell." Do not these words of our Lord Jesus remind you of this? Was he not carried away by the fervor of his devotion? Where was he when he uttered the words of our text? If I follow the language I might conclude that our Lord was already in heaven. He says, "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory." Does he not mean that they should be in heaven with him? Of course he does: yet he was not in heaven; he was still in the midst of his apostles, in the body upon earth: and he had yet Gethsemane and Golgotha before him ere he could enter his glory. He had prayed himself into such an exaltation of feeling that his prayer was in heaven, and he himself was there in spirit. What a hint this gives to us! How readily may we quit the field of battle, and the place of agony, and rise into such fellowship with God, that we may think, and speak, and act, as if we were already in possession of our eternal joy! By the ardor of prayer and the confidence of faith we may be caught up into paradise, and there utter words which are beyond the latitude of earth, and are dated "from the Delectable Mountains."

Nor is this all; for still the prayer rises, not only as to its matter and place, but in a very singular way it also takes to itself a higher style. Before, our Lord had asked and pleaded; but now he uses a firmer word: he says, "Father, I will." I would not force that

word so as to make it bear an imperious or commanding meaning, for the Saviour speaketh not so to the Father; but still it has a more elevated tone about it than asking. Our Lord here useth the royal manner rather than the tone of his humiliation. He speaketh like unto the Son of God; he addresses the great Father as one who counteth it not robbery to be equal with him, but exercises the prerogative of his eternal Sonship. He saith, "I will." This is a tone which belongs not to us except in a very modified degree; but it teaches us a lesson. It is well in prayer, when the Holy Spirit helpeth us, not only to groan out of the dust as suppliant sinners, but to seek unto our Father in the spirit of adoption with the confidence of children, and then with the promise of God in our hand we may with consecrated bravery lay hold upon the covenant angel, and cry, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." Importunity is a humble approach to this divine "I will." The will consecrated, educated, and sanctified, may and must reveal itself in our more spiritual petitions, just as with equal correctness it hides away when the pleading is for temporal things, and whispers, "Not as I will, but as thou wilt." The Lord pours upon his pleading servants at times a kind of inspiration by which they rise into power in prayer, and have their will of the Lord. Is it not written, "Delight thyself in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart"? We come at last to feel that the desires of our heart are inspired of his Spirit, and then that we have the petitions which we have asked of him.

There ought to be much for our edification in a text like this, which in subject, place and style rises to such an elevation. It is the apex of this wonderful pyramid

of prayer; the last round of the ladder of light. O Spirit of the Lord, instruct us while we behold it!

I have taken this text because it has taken hold on me. Our beloved brother, Charles Stanford, has just been taken from us. I seem to be standing as one of a company of disciples, and my brethren are melting away. My brethren, my comrades, my delights, are leaving me for the better land. We have enjoyed holy and happy fellowship in days of peace, and we have stood shoulder to shoulder in the battle of the Lord; but we are melting away. One has gone; another has gone; before we look round another will have departed. We see them for a moment, and they vanish from our gaze. It is true they do not rise into the air like the Divine Master from Olivet; yet do they rise, I am persuaded of that: only the poor body descends, and that descent is for a very little while. They rise, to be for ever with the Lord. The grief is to us who are left behind. What a gap is left where stood Hugh Stowell Brown! Who is to fill it? What a gap is left where stood Charles Stanford! Who is to fill it? Who among us will go next? We stand like men amazed. Some of us stood next in the rank with those who have been taken. Why this constant thinning of our ranks while the warfare is so stern? Why this removal of the very best when we so much need the noblest examples? I am bowed down, and could best express myself in a flood of tears as I survey the line of graves so newly digged; but I restrain myself from so carnal a mode of regarding the matter, and look upon it in a clearer light. The Master is gathering the ripest of his fruit, and well doth he deserve them. His own dear hand is putting his apples of gold into his baskets of

silver; and as we see that it is the Lord, we are bewildered no longer. His word, as it comes before us in the text, calms and quiets our spirits. It dries our tears, and calls us to rejoicing as we hear our heavenly Bridegroom praying, "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am." We understand why the dearest and best are going. We see in whose hand is held the magnet which attracts them to the skies. One by one they must depart from this lowland country to dwell above, in the palace of the King, for Jesus is drawing them to himself. Our dear babes go home because "he gathereth the lambs with his arm and carrieth them in his bosom;" and our ripe saints go home because the Beloved is come into his garden to gather lilies. These words of our Lord Jesus explain the continual home-going; they are the answer to the riddle which we call death. I am going to talk of how our honored brethren are not, because God taketh them; and I shall be happy if my words shall prepare us to exercise a holy readiness to see the grand request of our Redeemer fulfilled, even though it cost us many a sorrowful parting.

I. Let us begin as our text begins, and thus the first thought about the continual gathering to the house above will be THE HOME-WORD—the rallying word—"Father." Observe, our Lord had said, "Holy Father," and toward the close of the prayer he said, "O righteous Father;" but in commencing this particular petition he uses the word "Father" by itself alone: this relationship is in itself so dear that it agrees best with the loftiest petition. I like to think of that name "Father," as used in this connection. Is it not the centre of living unity? If there is to be a family gathering and reunion, where should it be but in the

father's house? Who is at the head of the table but the father? All the interests of the children unite in the parent, and he feels for them all.

From the great Father the Lord Jesus himself came forth. We do not understand the doctrine of the eternal filiation—we adore the mystery into which we may not pry. But we know that as our Lord Jesus is God-and-man Mediator, he came forth from the Father, and unto the Father's will he submitted himself in so doing. As for us, we come distinctly of that Father; it is he that made us, and not we ourselves; and, better and brighter fact still, of his own will begat he us by the word of truth. We were born a second time from heaven, and from our Heavenly Father our spiritual life is derived.

The whole of this sermon through, I want to show you that it is right that we should part with our brethren and joyfully permit of their going home; and surely I may at once ask you—What can be more right than that children should go home to their father? From him they came, to him they owe their life; should they not always tend towards him, and should not this be the goal of their being, that they should at last dwell in his presence? To go away from the Father and to live apart from him is the sorrow of our fallen nature as it plays the prodigal; but the coming back to the Father is restoration to life, to peace, to happiness. Yes, all our hopeful steps are towards the Father. We are saved when by believing in the name of Jesus we receive power to become the sons of God. Our sanctification lies in the bosom of our adoption. Because Jesus comes from the Father and leads us back to the Father, therefore is there a heaven for us. Wherefore, whenever we think of heaven, let us chiefly

think of the Father; for it is in our our Father's house that there are many mansions, and it is to the Father that our Lord has gone, that he may prepare a place for us.

"FATHER!" why, it is a bell that rings us home. He who hath the spirit of adoption feels that the Father draws him home, and he would fain run after him. How intensely did Jesus turn to the Father! He cannot speak of the glory wherein he is to be without coupling his Father with it. Brethren, it is in the Father that we live and move and have our being. Is there any spiritual life in the world which does not continually proceed from the life of the great Father? Is it not by the continual outcoming of the Holy Ghost from the Father that we remain spiritual men? And as from him we live, so for him we live if we live aright. We wish so to act as to glorify God in everything. Even our salvation should not be an ultimate end with any one of us; we should desire to glorify God by our salvation. We look upon the doctrines that we preach, and the precepts which we obey, as means to the glory of God, even the Father.

This is the consummation which the First-born looks for, and to which all of us who are like him are aspiring also, namely, that God may be all in all: that the great Father may be had in honor, and may be worshipped in every place. Since, then, we are from him, and of him, and to him, and for him, this word "Father" calls us to gather at his feet. Shall any one of us lament the process? No; we dare not complain that our choicest brethren are taken up to gladden the great Father's house. Our brother is gone; but we ask, "Where is he gone?" and when the answer comes, "He is gone to the Father," all notion of complaint is

over. To whom else should he go? When the great First-born went away from us, he told his sorrowing followers that he was going to their Father and his Father ; and that answer was enough. So, when our friend, or our child, or our wife, or our brother, is gone, it is enough that he is with the Father. To call them back does not occur to us; but rather we each one desire to follow after them.

“Father, I long, I faint to see
The place of thine abode;
I'd leave thine earthly courts and flee
Up to thy seat, my God.”

A child may be happy at school, but he longs for the holidays. Is it merely to escape his lessons? Ah, no! Ask him, and he will tell you. “I want to go home to see my father.” The same is equally true, and possibly more so, if we include the feminine form of parentage. What a home-cry is that of “mother!” The sight of that dear face has been longed and hungered for by many a child when far away. Mother or father, which you will; they are blended in the great Fatherhood of God. Let it but be said that any one has gone to his father, and no further question is asked as to the right of his going thither. To the father belongs the first possession of the child; should he not have his own child at home? The Saviour wipes our tears away with a handkerchief which is marked in the corner with this word—“Father.”

II. Secondly, I want your thoughts upon THE HOME IMPETUS. The force which draws us home lies in the word, “I will.” Jesus Christ, our most true God, veiled in human form, bows his knee and prays, and throws his divine energy into the prayer for the bringing home of his redeemed. This one irresistible, everlast-

ingly almighty prayer carries everything before it. "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am," is the centripetal energy which is drawing all the family of God towards its one home.

How shall the chosen get home to the Father? Chariots are provided. Here are the chariots of fire and horses of fire in this prayer. "I will," saith Jesus, "that they be with me;" and with him they must be. There are difficulties in the way—long nights and darkness lie between, and hills of guilt, and forests of trouble, and bands of fierce temptations; yet the pilgrims shall surely reach their journey's end, for the Lord's "I will" shall be a wall of fire round about them. In this petition I see both sword and shield for the church militant. Here I see the eagles' wings on which they shall be upborne till they enter within the golden gates. Jesus saith, "I will;" and who is he that shall hinder the home-coming of the chosen? As well hope to arrest the marches of the stars of heaven.

Examine the energy of this "I will" for a moment, and you will see, first, that it hath the force of an *intercessory prayer*. It is a gem from that wonderful breastplate of jewels which our great High-priest wore upon his breast when he offered his fullest intercession. I cannot imagine our Lord's interceding in vain. If he asks that we may be with him where he is, he must assuredly have his request. It is written, that "he was heard in that he feared." When with strong crying and tears he poured out his soul unto death, his Father granted the requests of his heart. I do not wonder it should be so; how could the best Beloved fail of that which he sought in inter-

cession from his Father God! Mark, then, that the force of irresistible intercession is drawing every blood-bought soul into the place where Jesus is. You cannot hold your dying babe; for Jesus asks for it to be with him. Will you come into competition with your Lord? Surely you will not. You cannot hold your aged father, nor detain your beloved mother, beyond the time appointed; for the intercession of Christ has such a force about it that they must ascend even as sparks must seek the sun.

More than intercession is found in the expression "I will." It suggests the idea of a *testamentary bequest* and appointment. The Lord Jesus is making his last will and testament, and he writes, "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me." No man who makes his will likes to have it frustrated. Our Saviour's testament will assuredly be carried out in every jot and tittle; and, if for no other reason, yet certainly for this cause, that though he died, and thus made his will valid, yet he lives again to be his own executor, and to carry out his will. When I read in our Lord's testament the words, "Father, I will that they be with me," I ask, "Who is to hold them back?" They must in due time be with him, for the will of the ever blessed Saviour must be carried out: there can be no standing against a force of that kind.

No is this all: the words read to me, not only like intercession and testamentary decree, but there is a strong expression of *desire, resolve, and purpose*. Jesus desires it, and saith, "I will." It is a deliberate desire—a forcible, distinct, resolute, determined purpose. The will of God is supreme law. It needeth not that he should speak; he doth but will or purpose, and the

thing is done. Now read my text: "I will that they be with me:" the Son of God wills it. How are the saints to be hindered from what the Lord wills? They must rise from their beds of dust and silent clay:— they must rise to be with Jesus where he is, for Jesus wills it. By your anxious care you may seek to detain them; you may sit about their bed and nurse them both night and day, but they must quit these dark abodes when Jesus gives the signal. You may clutch them with affectionate eagerness, and even cry in despair, "They shall not go, we cannot bear to part with them;" but go they must when Jesus calls. Take back your naughty hands, which would detain them; for naughty they are if you would rob your Saviour. Would you cross *his* will? Would you set at naught his testament? You could not if you would; you would not if you could. Rather be inclined to go with them than think to resist the heavenly attraction which upraises them. If Jesus saith, "I will," then it is yours to say, "Not as I will, but as thou wilt." They were never so much mine as they are thine. I never had so much right to them as thou hast who hast bought them. They never so truly could be at home with me as they will be at home with thee in thine own bosom; so my will dissolves itself into thy will, and I say with steadfast resignation, 'Let them go.'

Brothers and sisters, you perceive the forces which are bearing away our beloved ones. I see tender hands reaching after us this morning: they are invisible to sense, but palpable to faith. Cords of love are being cast about the chosen, and they are being drawn out secretly from their fellows. Would you break those bands asunder, and cast those cords from us? I beseech you, think not so; but let that

pierced hand which bought the beloved ones seek out its own purchase and bring them home. Should not Jesus have his own? Do we not bow our knee and pray for Jesus, "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven"?

III. But now I want to conduct you farther into the text. We have had the home-word and the home-bringing impetus, and now let us carefully note the HOME CHARACTER. "Father, I will that *they also, whom thou hast given me*, be with me where I am." The description is—"They also, whom thou hast given me." The Greek is somewhat difficult to translate. The translators of the Revised Version were, no doubt, excellent Greek scholars, and if they had known a little more English, they might have come a little nearer to a perfect translation: but they do not always appear to think the common English reader to be worthy of their consideration. This is their translation in the present instance:—"Father, that which thou hast given me, I will that, where I am they also may be with me." This, to speak plainly, sounds very like nonsense. It is the translation which a boy would present to his tutor at school, but it is of small use to the general reader. It is literal, no doubt; but literalisms are often another proof that the letter killeth. Translators into the English tongue might have contrived to have given us words with a meaning in them. I merely quote the version to show you that there is here a something in the singular as well as persons in the plural. "Father, I will concerning *that* which thou hast given me, that *they* may be with me where I am." Our Lord looked upon those whom the Father gave him as one—one body, one church, one bride: he willed that as a whole the

church should be with him where he is. Then he looked again and saw each of the many individuals of whom the one church is composed, and he prayed that each, that all of these, might be with him and behold his glory. Jesus never so prays for the whole church, as to forget a single member; neither does he so pray for the members individually as to overlook the corporate capacity of the whole. Sweet thought! Jesus wills to have the whole of what he bought with his precious blood with him in heaven; he will not lose any part. He did not die for a part of a church, nor will he be satisfied unless the entire flock which he has purchased shall be gathered around him.

But while the Lord looks at those whom his Father gave him as one body, he looks upon you, and me, and each believer here, as a part of that great unity, and his prayer is that all of us may be with him. I believe that he prays as much for the least as for the greatest, as much for Benjamin as for Judah, as much for the despondent as for those who are fully assured. The prayer is one of great breadth and comprehensiveness, but yet it is not the prayer which those who believe in Universalism would put into his mouth. He does not pray that those who die unbelievers may be with him where he is; neither does he will that souls in hell should one day come out of it and be with him in glory. There is no trace of that doctrine in holy writ: those who teach such fables draw their inspiration from some other source. The new purgatory, in which so many have come to believe, is unknown to Holy Scripture. No, our Lord's prayer is distinctly for those whom the Father gave him—for every one of these, but for no others. His "I will" concerns them only.

I feel right glad that there is no sort of personal character mentioned here, but only—"Those whom thou hast given me." It seems as if the Lord in his last moments was not so much looking at the fruit of grace as at grace itself; he did not so much note either the perfections or the imperfections of his people, but only the fact that they were his by the eternal gift of the Father: "They belonged to the Father—"thine they were." The Father gave them to Jesus—"thou gavest them me." The Father gave them as a love token and a means of his Son's glorification—"Thine they were and thou gavest them me:" and now our Lord pleads that because they were the Father's gift to him he should have them with him. Does anybody raise a cavil as to Christ's right to have those with him who were his Father's, whom his Father gave him, and whom he himself actually took into his own possession? No, they ought to be with him, since they are his in so divine a manner. If I possess a love-token that some dear one has given me, I may rightly desire to have it with me. Nobody can have such a right to your wedding-ring, good sister, as you have yourself; and are not Christ's saints, as it were, a signet upon his finger, a token which his Father gave him of his good pleasure in him? Should they not be with Jesus where he is, since they are his crown jewels and his glory? We in our creature love lift up our hands and cry, "My Lord, my Master, let me have this dear one with me a little longer. I need the companionship of one so sweet, or life will be misery to me." But if Jesus looks us in the face, and says, "Is thy right better than mine?" we draw back at once. He has a greater part in his saints than we can have. O Jesus, thy Father gave them to thee of old; they are

his reward for the travail of thy soul; and far be it from us to deny thee. Though blinded by our tears, we can yet see the rights of Jesus, and we loyally admit them. We cry concerning our best beloved, "The Lord hath taken away, and blessed be the name of the Lord." Does not the text sweetly comfort us in the taking away of one and another, since it shows how they belong to Christ?

IV. And now, advancing another step, Christ reveals to us something concerning THE HOME COMPANIONSHIP in the glory land. Those who are taken away, where are they gone? The text saith, "I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory."

By this language we are impressed with *the nearness of the saints to Christ in glory*—"that they may be with me." Think for a moment: when our Lord used these words, and John took them down, the disciples were with him. They had left the supper-table where they had feasted together. The Master had said, "Arise, let us go hence;" and it was in the very midst of them that the Lord Jesus offered this choice prayer. Learn, then, that in heaven the saints will be nearer to Christ than the apostles were when they sat at the table with him, or heard him pray. That was a nearness which might consist only in place, and their minds might still be, as they often were, far away from him: but up in heaven we shall be one with him in sympathy, in spirit, in conscious fellowship. We shall be with Jesus in the closest, clearest, and most complete sense. No fellowship on earth can reach to the plenitude of the communion we shall enjoy above. "With him"—"for ever with the Lord"—this is heaven. Who would wish to detain from such companionship those whom we love?

Yet do not drop the thought of place, lest you refine away the essence of the prayer. Let us see the spiritual clearly, but let us not, on that account, make the sense less real, less matter-of-fact. To the prayer that his saints may be with him, our Lord added the words, "May be with me where I am." Our bodies will rise from the dust, and they *must occupy a place*: that place will be where Jesus is. Even spirits must be somewhere, and that somewhere with us is to be where Jesus is. We are to be, not metaphorically and fancifully, but really, truly, literally with Jesus. We shall enjoy an intense nearness to him in that blessed place which the Father has prepared for him, and which he is preparing for us. There is a place where Jesus is revealed in all the splendor of his majesty, amid angels and glorified spirits; and those whom our Lord's will has taken away from us have not gone into banishment in a mysterious land, neither are they shut up in a house of detention till there is a general jail delivery, but they are with Christ in Paradise. They serve him, and they see his face. Who would be so cruel as to keep a saint from such a fair country? I would desire all good for my children, my relatives, my friends: and what good is better than to be where Jesus is? Are you not glad to hear of the promotion of those you love? Will you quarrel with God because some of your dearest ones are promoted to the skies? The thought of their amazing bliss greatly moderates our natural grief. We weep for ourselves, but as we remember their companionship with the Altogether Lovely One, a smile blends with our tears.

Notice the *occupation* of those who are with Jesus: "That they may behold my glory." I do not wonder

that Jesus wants his dear ones to be with him for this purpose, since love always pines for a partner in its joys. When I have been abroad, and have been specially charmed with glorious scenery, I have a hundred times felt myself saying, almost involuntarily, "How I wish that my dear wife could be here! I should enjoy this a hundred times as much if she could but see it!" It is an instinct of affection to seek fellowship in joy. The Lord Jesus is truly human, and he feels this unselfish desire of every loving human heart, and therefore says, "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory." Our Lord graciously permits his disciples to have fellowship with him in his sufferings, and hence he is all the more desirous that they should participate in his glory. He knows that nothing will be a greater joy to them than to see *him* exalted; therefore he would give them this highest form of delight. Was not Joseph delighted when he said to his brethren, "Ye shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt;" and still more so when he could actually show his father how great was his power, how exalted was his rank. It is joy to Jesus to let us behold his joy, and it will be glory to us to behold his glory. Should not the redeemed ascend to such blessed delights? Would you hinder them?

How unselfish it is on our Lord's part to think himself not fully glorified till we behold his glory! How unselfish he will make us also, since it will be our glory to see his glory! He does not say that he is going to take us home, that we may be in glory, but that we may behold his glory. His glory is better to us than any personal glory: all things are more ours by being his. Glory, apart from him, were no glory. Beloved, even

as our Lord seems to lose himself in his people, his people hide themselves away in him. It is his glory to glorify them ; it is their glory to glorify him ; and it will be the glory of glories for them to be glorified together. Who would not go to this heaven ? Who would keep a brother out of it an hour !

Observe the fellowship which exists in the glory land. Read the verse : "That *they* may behold *my* glory, which *thou* hast given *me*." What a blending of persons ! Where did our Lord's glory come from ? "Thou gavest it me," says Jesus. Hence it is the Father's glory passed over to the Son. Yet Jesus calls it "my glory," for it is truly his own. The saints are to behold this, and it will be their glory to see it. Here we have the Father, and the Elder Brother, and the many brethren, and a wonderful communism of interests and possessions. It is ever so in a loving family. There we draw no hard and fast lines of *meum* and *tuum*. "All thine are mine, and mine are thine." We ask not whose is this ? or whose is that ? when we are at home. If you were to go into a stranger's house, you would not think of taking this or that ; but as your father's own son you make yourself at home, and no one inquires, "What doest thou ?" Bridegroom and bride do not quarrel about property whether it be his or hers. Laws have been made lately to settle different estates for those who are one : this is well enough when love is gone, but true conjugal love laughs at all that can make separate that which God hath joined together. The wife says, "That is mine." "No," saith the caviller, "it is your husband's." Her answer is, "and therefore it is mine." In that blessed union into which divine love has admitted us Christ is ours, and we are Christ's ; his Father is our Father ;

we are one with him, he is one with the Father : and hence all things are ours, and the Father himself loveth us. All this will not only be true in heaven, but it will there be realized and acted on. So when the Lord brings his people home, we shall be one with him, and he one with the Father, and we also in him one with the Father, so that we shall then find boundless glory in beholding the glory of our Lord and God. My text has baffled me. I am beaten back by its blaze of light. Forgive me. I had a thought, but I cannot express it. The fire of my text burns with such fervent heat that it threatens to consume me if I draw nearer to it. Easily could I step into heaven—so I feel at this moment.

V. I must end by speaking of THE HOME ATMOSPHERE. None of us can wish our departed friends back from their thrones. Since they have gone to be where Jesus is, and to enter so fully into the most blissful fellowship with him and the Father, we would not have them return even for an instant to this poor country. We only wish that our turn for migration may come soon. We would not be too long divided from our fellows. If some of the birds have gone to the sunny land, let us plume our wings to follow them. There will be only a little interval between our parting and our everlasting meeting. Look at the many who died before we came into the world. Some of them have been in heaven together now for thousands of years. To them it must seem that they were only divided by a moment's interval ; their continents of fellowship have made the channel of death seem but a streak of sea. Soon we shall take the same view of things.

Breathe the home atmosphere. Jesus tells us that the atmosphere of his home is *love*: "Thou lovedst me

before the foundation of the world." Brethren, can you follow me in a great flight? Can you stretch broader wings than the condor ever knew, and fly back into the unbeginning eternity? There was a day before all days, when there was no day but the Ancient of Days. There was a time before all time, when God only was: the uncreated, the only-existent One. The Divine Three, Father, Son, and Spirit, lived in blessed consort with each other, delighting in each other. Oh the intensity of the divine love of the Father, to the Son! There was no world, no sun, no moon, no stars, no universe, but God alone; and the whole of God's omnipotence flowed forth in a stream of love to the Son, while the Son's whole being remained eternally one with the Father by a mysterious essential union. How came all this which we now see and hear? Why this creation? this fall of Adam? this redemption? this church? this heaven? How came it all about? It needed not to have been, but the Father's love made him resolve to show forth the glory of his Son. The mysterious volume which has been gradually unfolded before us has only this one design—the Father would make known his love to the Son, and make the Son's glories to appear before the eyes of those whom the Father gave him. This Fall and this Redemption, and the story as a whole, so far as the divine purpose is concerned, are the fruit of the Father's love to the Son, and his delight in glorifying the Son. Those myriads, those white-robed myriads, harping to music infinitely deep, what mean they all? They are the Father's delight in the Son. That he might be glorified for ever, he permitted that he should bear a human body, and should suffer, bleed and die, so that there might come out of him, as a harvest cometh from a dying and bur-

ied corn of wheat, all the countless hosts of elect souls ordained for ever to a felicity exceeding bounds. These are the bride of the Lamb, the body of Christ, the fulness of him that filleth all in all. Their destiny is so high that no language can fully describe it. God only knows the love of God ; and all that it has prepared for those who are the objects of it.

Love wraps up the whole in its cloth of gold. Love is both the source and the channel, and the end of the divine acting. Because the Father loved the Son he gave us to him, and ordained that we should be with him. His love to us is love to the Son. "Not for your sakes do I this, O House of Israel ; be ashamed and be confounded." Because of the boundless, ineffable, infinite love of the great Father toward his Son, therefore hath he ordained this whole system of salvation and redemption, that Jesus in the church of his redeemed might everlastingly be glorified. Let our saintly ones go home, beloved, if that is the design of their going. Since all comes of divine love, and all sets forth divine love, let them go to him who loves them—let divine love fulfil its purpose of bringing many sons unto glory. Since the Father once made our Lord perfect by his sufferings, let him now be made perfectly glorious by the coming up of his redeemed from the purifying bath of his atonement. I see them rise like sheep from the washing, all of them gathering with delight at the feet of that great Shepherd of the sheep.

Beloved, I am lost in the subject now. I breathe that heavenly air. Love surrounds all and conquers grief. I will not cause the temperature to fall by uttering any other words but this—Hold your friends lovingly, but be ready to yield them to Jesus. Detain

them not from him to whom they belong. When they are sick, fast and pray; but when they are departed, do much as David did, who washed his face, and ate, and drank. You cannot bring them back again; you will go to them, they cannot return to you. Comfort yourselves with the double thought of their joy in Christ and Christ's joy in them; add the triple thought of the Father's joy in Christ and in them. Let us watch the Master's call. Let us not dread the question—who next, and who next? Let none of us start back as though we hoped to linger longer than others. Let us even desire to see our names in the celestial conscription. Let us be willing to be dealt with just as our Lord pleases. Let no doubt intervene: let no gloom encompass us. Dying is but going home: indeed, there is no dying for the saints. Charles Stanford is gone! Thus was his death told to me—"He drew up his feet and smiled." Thus will you and I depart. He had borne his testimony in the light, even when blind. He had cheered us all, though he was the greatest sufferer of us all; and now the film has gone from the eyes, and the *anguish* is gone from the heart, and he is with Jesus. He smiled. What a sight was that which caused that smile! I have seen many faces of dear departed ones lit up with splendor. Of many I could feel sure that they had seen a vision of angels. Traces of a reflected glory hung about their countenances. O brethren, we shall soon know more of heaven than all the divines can tell us. Let us go home now to our own dwellings: but let us pledge ourselves that we will meet again. But where shall we appoint the trysting place? It would be idle to appoint any spot of earth, for this assembly will never come together again

in this world. We will meet with Jesus, where he is, where we shall behold his glory. Some of you cannot do this. Turn from your evil ways. Turn to the right, where stands that cross, and keep straight on, and you will come to Jesus in glory. Blessed be the name of the Lord! Amen.

V.

THE THREE HOURS' DARKNESS.

April 18, 1886.

“Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour.”—MATTHEW xxvii. 45.

FROM nine till noon the usual degree of light was present; so that there was time enough for our Lord's adversaries to behold and insult his sufferings. There could be no mistake about the fact that he was really nailed to the cross; for he was crucified in broad daylight. We are fully assured that it was Jesus of Nazareth, for both friends and foes were eye-witnesses of his agonies: for three long hours the Jews sat down and watched him on the cross, making jests of his miseries. I feel thankful for those three hours of light; for else the enemies of our faith would have questioned whether in very deed the blessed body of our Master was nailed to the tree, and would have started fancies as many as the bats and owls which haunt the darkness. Where would have been the witnesses of this solemn scene if the sun had been hidden from morn till night? As three hours of light gave opportunity for inspection and witness-bearing, we see the wisdom which did not allow it to close too soon.

Never forget that this miracle of the closing of the eye of day at high noon was performed by our Lord in his weakness. He had walked the sea, and raised the dead, and healed the sick, in the days of his strength:

but now he has come to his lowest, the fever is on him, he is faint and thirsty. He hangs on the borders of dissolution; yet has he power to darken the sun at noon. He is still very God of very God :

“ Behold, a purple torrent run
Down from his hands and head,
The crimson tide puts out the sun ;
His groans awake the dead.”

If he can do this in his weakness, what is he not able to do in his strength? Fail not to remember that this power was displayed in a sphere in which he did not usually put forth his might. The sphere of Christ is that of goodness and benevolence, and consequently of light. When he enters the sphere of darkness-making, and of working judgment, he engages in what he calls his strange work. Wonders of terror are his left-handed deeds. It is but now and then that he causes the sun to go down at noon, and darkens the earth in the clear day (Amos viii. 9). If our Lord can make darkness at will as he dies, what glory may we not expect now that he lives to be the light of the city of God for ever? The Lamb is the light; and what a light! The heavens bear the impress of his dying power, and lose their brightness; shall not the new heavens and the new earth attest the power of the risen Lord? The thick darkness around the dying Christ is the robe of the Omnipotent: he liveth again, all power is in his hands, and all that power he will put forth to bless his chosen.

What a call must that mid-day midnight have been to the careless sons of men! They knew not that the Son of God was among them: nor that he was working out human redemption. The grandest hour in all history seemed likely to pass by unheeded, when, sud-

denly, night hastened from her chambers and usurped the day. Every one asked his fellow, "What means this darkness?" Business stood still: the plough stayed in mid-furrow, and the axe paused uplifted. It was the middle of the day, when men are busiest; but they made a general pause. Not only on Calvary, but on every hill, and in every valley, the gloom settled down. There was a halt in the caravan of life. None could move unless they groped their way like the blind. The master of the house called for a light at noon, and his servant tremblingly obeyed the unusual summons. Other lights were twinkling, and Jerusalem was as a city by night, only men were not in their beds. How startled were mankind! Around the great death-bed an appropriate quiet was secured. I doubt not that a shuddering awe came over the masses of the people, and the thoughtful foresaw terrible things. Those who had stood about the cross, and had dared to insult the majesty of Jesus, were paralyzed with fear. They ceased their ribaldry, and with it their cruel exultation. They were cowed though not convinced, even the basest of them; while the better sort "smote their breasts and returned." As many as could do so, no doubt stumbled to their chambers, and endeavored to hide themselves, for fear of awful judgments which they feared were near. I do not wonder that there should be traditions of strange things that were said during the hush of that darkness. Those whispers of the past may or not be true: they have been the subject of learned controversy, but the labor of the dispute was energy ill-spent. Yet we could not have wondered if one did say, as he is reported to have done, "God is suffering, or the world is perishing." Nor should I drive from my beliefs the poetic legend that

an Egyptian pilot passing down the river heard among the reedy banks a voice out of the nestling rushes, whispering, "The great Pan is dead." Truly, the God of nature was expiring, and things less tender than the reeds by the river might well tremble at the sound thereof.

We are told that this darkness was over all the land; and Luke puts it, "over all the earth." That portion of our globe which was then veiled in natural night was not affected thereby; but to all men awake, and at their employment, it was the advertisement of a great and solemn event. It was strange beyond all experience, and all men marvelled; for when the light should have been brightest, all things were obscured for the space of three hours.

There must be great teaching in this darkness; for when we come so near the cross, which is the centre of history, every event is full of meaning. Light will come out of this darkness. I love to feel the solemnity of the three hours of death-shade, and to sit down therein and meditate, with no companion but the august sufferer, around whom that darkness lowered. I am going to speak of it in four ways, as the Holy Spirit may help me. First, let us bow our spirits in the presence of *a miracle which amazes us*: secondly, let us regard this darkness as *a veil which conceals*; thirdly, as *a symbol which instructs*, and fourthly, as *a display of sympathy*, which forewarns us by the prophecies which it implies.

I. First, let us view this darkness as A MIRACLE WHICH AMAZES US.

It may seem a trite observation that this darkness was altogether out of the natural course of things. Since the world began was it not heard that at high noon there should be darkness over all the land. It

was out of the order of nature altogether. Some deny miracles; and if they also deny God, I will not at this time deal with them. But it is very strange that any one who believes in God should doubt the possibility of miracles. It seems to me that, granted the being of a God, miracle is to be expected as an occasional declaration of his independent and active will. He may make certain rules for his actions, and it may be his wisdom to keep to them; but surely he must reserve to himself the liberty to depart from his own laws, or else he has in a measure laid aside his personal Godhead, deified law, and set it up above himself. It would not increase our idea of the glory of his Godhead if we could be assured that he had made himself subject to rule, and tied his own hands from ever acting except in a certain manner. From the self-existence and freedom of will which enter into our very conception of God, we are led to expect that sometimes he should not keep to the methods which he follows as his general rule. This has led to the universal conviction that miracle is a proof of Godhead. The general works of creation and providence are to my mind the best proofs; but the common heart of our race, for some reason or other, looks to miracle as surer evidence; thus proving that miracle is expected of God. Although the Lord makes it his order that there shall be day and night, he in this case, with abundant reason, interposes three hours of night in the centre of a day. Behold the reason. The unusual in lower nature is made to consort with the unusual in the dealings of nature's Lord. Certainly this miracle was most congruous with that greater miracle which was happening in the death of Christ. Was not the Lord himself departing from all common ways? Was he not doing

that which had never been done from the beginning, and would never be done again? That man should die is so common a thing as to be deemed inevitable. We are not startled now at the sound of a funeral knell: we have become familiar with the grave. As the companions of our youth die at our side we are not seized with amazement; for death is everywhere about us and within us. But that the Son of God should die, this is beyond all expectation, and not only above nature, but contrary thereto. He who is equal with God deigns to hang upon the cross, and die. I know of nothing that seems more out of rule and beyond expectation than this. The sun darkened at noon is a fit accompaniment of the death of Jesus. Is it not so?

Further, this miracle was not only out of the order of nature, but it was one which *would have been pronounced impossible*. It is not possible that there should be an eclipse of the sun at the time of the full moon. The moon at the time when she is in her full is not in a position in which she could possibly cast her shadow upon the earth. The Passover was at the time of the full moon, and therefore it was not possible that the sun should then undergo an eclipse. This darkening of the sun was not strictly an astronomical eclipse; the darkness was doubtless produced in some other way: yet to those who were present it did seem to be a total eclipse of the sun—a thing impossible. Ah, brothers! when we come to deal with man, and the fall, and sin, and God, and Christ, and the atonement, we are at home with impossibilities. We have now reached a region where prodigies, and marvels, and surprises, are the order of the day: sublimities become common-places when we come within the circle of eternal love. Yea, more; we have now quitted the solid land of the

possible, and have put out to sea, where we see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep. When we think of impossibilities in other spheres, we start back; but the way of the cross is ablaze with the divine, and we soon perceive that "with God all things are possible." See, then, in the death of Jesus, the possibility of the impossible! Behold here how the Son of God can die. We sometimes pause when we meet with an expression in a hymn which implies that God can suffer or die; we think that the poet has used too great a license: yet it behoves us to refrain from hypercriticism, since in Holy Writ there are words like it. We even read (Acts xx. 28) of "the church of God which he hath purchased with his own blood"—the blood of God! Ah well! I am not careful to defend the language of the Holy Ghost; but in its presence I take liberty to justify the words which we sang just now:

"Well might the sun in darkness hide,
And shut his glories in,
When God, the mighty Maker, died
For man, the creature's sin."

I will not venture to explain the death of the incarnate God. I am content to believe it, and to rest my hope upon it.

How should the Holy One have sin laid upon him? That also I do not know. A wise man has told us, as if it were an axiom, that the imputation or the non-imputation of sin is an impossibility. Be it so: we have become familiar with such things since we have beheld the cross. Things which men call absurdities have become foundation truths to us. The doctrine of the cross is to them that perish foolishness. We do know that in our Lord was no sin, and yet he his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree. We do not

know how the innocent Son of God could be permitted to suffer for sins that were not his own; it amazes us that justice should permit one so perfectly holy to be forsaken of his God, and to cry out, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" But it was so; and it was so by the decree of the highest justice; and we rejoice therein. As it was so, that the sun was eclipsed when it was impossible that he should be eclipsed, so has Jesus performed on our behalf, in the agonies of his death, things which in the ordinary judgment of men, must be set down as utterly impossible. Our faith is at home in wonder-land, where the Lord's thoughts are seen to be as high above our thoughts as the heavens are above the earth.

Concerning this miracle, I have also further to remark that *this darkening of the sun surpassed all ordinary and natural eclipses*. It lasted longer than an ordinary eclipse, and it came in a different manner. According to Luke, the darkness all over the land came first, and the sun was darkened afterwards: the darkness did not begin with the sun, but mastered the sun. It was unique and supernatural. Now, among all griefs no grief is comparable to the grief of Jesus: of all woes none can parallel the woes of our great Substitute. As strongest light casts deepest shade, so has the surprising love of Jesus cost him a death such as falls not to the common lot of men. Others die, but this man is "obedient unto death." Others drink the fatal draught, yet reckon not of its wormwood and gall; but he "tasted death." "He poured out his soul unto death." Every part of his being was darkened with that extraordinary death-shade: and the natural darkness outside of him did but shroud a special death which was entirely by itself.

And now, when I come to think of it, *this darkness appears to have been most natural and fitting.* If we had to write out the story of our Lord's death we could not omit the darkness without neglecting a most important item. The darkness seems a part of the natural furniture of that great transaction. Read the story through and you are not at all startled with the darkness; after once familiarizing your mind with the thought that this is the Son of God, and that he stretches his hands to the cruel death of the cross, you do not wonder at the rending of the veil of the temple; you are not astonished at the earthquake or at the rising of certain of the dead. These are proper attendants of our Lord's passion; and so is the darkness. It drops into its place, it seems as if it could not have been otherwise.

“ That sacrifice!—the death of him—
The high and ever Holy One!
Well may the conscious heaven grow dim,
And blacken the beholding sun.”

For a moment think again. Has not it appeared as if the death which that darkness shrouded was also a natural part of the great whole? We have grown at last to feel as if the death of the Christ of God were an integral part of human history. You cannot take it out of man's chronicle; can you? Introduce the Fall, and see *Paradise Lost*, and you cannot make the poem complete till you have introduced that greater Man who did redeem us, and by his death gave us our *Paradise Regained*. It is a singular characteristic of all true miracles, that though your wonder never ceases, they never appear to be unnatural: they are marvellous, but never monstrous. The miracles of Christ dovetail into the general run of human history: we

cannot see how the Lord could be on earth and Lazarus not be raised from the dead when the grief of Martha and Mary had told its tale. We cannot see how the disciples could have been tempest-tossed on the Lake of Galilee and the Christ not walk on the water to deliver them. Wonders of power are expected parts of the narrative where Jesus is. Everything fits into its place with surrounding facts. A Romish miracle is always monstrous and devoid of harmony with all beside it. What if St. Winifred's head did come up from the well and speak from the coping to the astonished peasant who was about to draw water! I do not care whether it did or did not; it does not alter history a bit, nor even color it; it is tagged on to the record and is no part of it. But the miracles of Jesus, this of the darkness among them, are essential to human history; and especially is this so in the case of his death and this great darkness which shrouded it. All things in human story converge to the cross, which seems not to be an after-thought nor an expedient, but the fit and foreordained channel through which love should run to guilty men.

I cannot say more from want of voice, though I had many more things to say. Sit down, and let the thick darkness cover you till you cannot even see the cross, and only know that out of reach of mortal eye your Lord wrought out the redemption of his people. He wrought in silence a miracle of patience and of love, by which light has come to those who sit in darkness and in the valley of the shadow of death.

II. Secondly, I desire you to regard this darkness as A VEIL WHICH CONCEALS. The Christ is hanging on yonder tree. I see the dreadful cross. I can see the thieves on either side. I look around, and I sorrow-

fully mark that motley group of citizens from Jerusalem, and scribes, and priests, and strangers from different countries, mingled with Roman soldiers. They turn their eyes on him, and for the most part gaze with cruel scorn upon the Holy One who is in the centre. In truth it an awful sight. Mark those dogs of the common sort and those bulls of Bashan of more notable rank, who all unite to dishonor the meek and lowly One. I must confess I never read the story of the Master's death, knowing what I do of the pain of crucifixion, without deep anguish: crucifixion was a death worthy to have been invented by devils. The pain which it involved was immeasurable; I will not torture you by describing it. I know dear hearts that cannot read of it without tears, and without lying awake for nights afterwards.

But there was more than anguish upon Calvary: ridicule and contempt embittered all. Those jests, those cruel gibes, those mockeries, those thrustings out of the tongue, what shall we say of these? At times I have felt some little sympathy with the French Prince who cried, "If I had been there with my guards, I would soon have swept those wretches away." It was too terrible a sight: the pain of the victim was grievous enough, but the abominable wickedness of the mockers who could bear? Let us thank God that in the middle of the crime there came down a darkness which rendered it impossible for them to go further with it. Jesus must die: for his pains there must be no alleviation, and from death there must be for him no deliverance; but the scoffers must be silenced. Most effectually their mouths were closed by the dense darkness which shut them in.

What I see in that veil is, first of all, that it was a

concealment for those guilty enemies. Did you ever think of that? It is as if God himself said, "I cannot bear it. I will not see this infamy! Descend, O veil!" Down fell the heavy shades.

"I asked the heavens, 'What foe to God hath done
This unexampled deed?' The heavens exclaim,
'T was man; and we in horror snatched the sun
From such a spectacle of guilt and shame.'"

Thank God, the cross is a hiding-place. It furnishes for guilty men a shelter from the all-seeing eye, so that justice need not see and strike. When God lifts up his Son, and makes him visible, he hides the sin of men. He says that "the times of their ignorance he winks at." Even the greatness of their sin he casts behind his back, so that he need not see it, but may indulge his long-suffering, and permit his pity to endure their provocations. It must have grieved the heart of the eternal God to see such wanton cruelty of men towards him who went about doing good, and healing all manner of diseases. It was horrible to see the teachers of the people rejecting him with scorn, the seed of Israel, who ought to have accepted him as their Messiah, casting him out as a thing despised and abhorred. I therefore feel gratitude to God for bidding that darkness cover all the land, and end that shameful scene. I would say to any guilty ones here: Thank God that the Lord Jesus has made it possible for your sins to be hidden more completely than by thick darkness. Thank God that in Christ he does not see you with that stern eye of justice which would involve your destruction. Had not Jesus interposed, whose death you have despised, you had wrought out in your own death the result of your own sin long ago; but for your Lord's sake you are allowed to live as if

God did not see you. This long-suffering is meant to bring you to repentance. Will you not come?

But, further, that darkness was *a sacred concealment for the blessed Person of our divine Lord*. So to speak, the angels found for their King a pavilion of thick clouds, in which his Majesty might be sheltered in its hour of misery. It was too much for wicked eyes to gaze so rudely on that immaculate Person. Had not his enemies stripped him naked, and cast lots upon his vesture? Therefore it was meet that the holy manhood should at length find suitable concealment. It was not fit that brutal eyes should see the lines made upon that blessed form by the graving tool of sorrow. It was not meet that revellers should see the contortions of that sacred frame, indwelt with Deity, while he was being broken beneath the iron rod of divine wrath on our behalf. It was meet that God should cover him, so that none should see all he did and all he bare when he was made sin for us. I bless God devoutly for thus hiding my Lord away: thus was he screened from eyes which were not fit to see the Sun, much less to look upon the Sun of Righteousness.

This darkness also warns us, even us who are most reverent. This darkness tells us all that *the Passion is a great mystery, into which we cannot pry*. I try to explain it as substitution, and I feel that where the language of Scripture is explicit, I may and must be explicit too. But yet I feel that the idea of substitution does not cover the whole of the matter, and that no human conception can completely grasp the whole of the dread mystery. It was wrought in darkness, because the full, far-reaching meaning and result cannot be beheld of finite mind. Tell me the death of the Lord Jesus was a grand example of self-sacrifice—I

can see *that* and much more. Tell me it was a wondrous obedience to the will of God—I can see *that* and much more. Tell me it was the bearing of what ought to have been borne by myriads of sinners of the human race, as the chastisement of their sin—I can see *that*, and found my best hope upon it. But do not tell me that this is all that is in the cross. No, great as this would be, there is much more in our Redeemer's death. God only knows the love of God: Christ only knows all that he accomplished when he bowed his head and gave up the ghost. There are common mysteries of nature into which it were irreverence to pry; but this is a divine mystery, before which we put our shoes from off our feet, for the place called Calvary is holy ground. God veiled the cross in darkness, and in darkness much of its deeper meaning lies; not because God would not reveal it, but because we have not capacity enough to discern it all. God was manifest in the flesh, and in that human flesh he put away sin by his own sacrifice: this we all know; but “without controversy great is the mystery of godliness.”

Once again, this veil of darkness also pictures to me the way in which *the powers of darkness will always endeavor to conceal the cross of Christ*. We fight with darkness when we try to preach the cross. “This is your hour, and the power of darkness,” said Christ; and I doubt not that the infernal hosts made in that hour a fierce assault upon the spirit of our Lord. Thus much also we know, that if the prince of darkness be anywhere in force, it is sure to be where Christ is lifted up. To becloud the cross is the grand object of the enemy of souls. Did you ever notice it? These fellows who hate the gospel will let every other doctrine pass muster; but if the atonement be preached, and the

truths which grow out of it, straightway they are aroused. Nothing provokes the devil like the cross. Modern theology has for its main object the obscuration of the doctrine of atonement. These modern cuttle-fishes make the water of life black with their ink. They make out sin to be a trifle, and the punishment of it to be a temporary business; and thus they degrade the remedy by underrating the disease. We are not ignorant of their devices. Expect, my brethren, that the clouds of darkness will gather as to a centre around the cross, that they may hide it from the sinner's view. But, expect this also, that there darkness shall meet its end. Light springeth out of that darkness—the light eternal of the undying Son of God, who having risen from the dead, liveth for ever to scatter the darkness of evil.

III. Now we pass on to speak of this darkness as a SYMBOL WHICH INSTRUCTS.

The veil falls down and conceals; but at the same time, as an emblem, it reveals. It seems to say, "Attempt not to search within, but learn from the veil itself: it hath cherub work upon it." This darkness teaches us what Jesus suffered: it aids us to guess at the griefs which we may not actually see.

The darkness is the symbol of *the wrath of God which fell on those who slew his only begotten Son*. God was angry, and his frown removed the light of day. Well might he be angry, when sin was murdering his only Son; when the Jewish husbandmen were saying, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance." This is God's wrath towards all mankind, for practically all men concurred in the death of Jesus. That wrath has brought men into darkness; they are ignorant, blinded, bewildered

They have come to love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil. In that darkness they do not repent, but go on to reject the Christ of God. Into this darkness God cannot look upon them in complacency; but he views them as children of darkness, and heirs of wrath, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever.

The symbol also tells us *what our Lord Jesus Christ endured*. The darkness outside of him was the figure of the darkness that was within him. In Gethsemane a thick darkness fell upon our Lord's spirit. He was "exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." His joy was communion with God—that joy was gone, and he was in the dark. His day was the light of his Father's face: that face was hidden and a terrible night gathered around him. Brothers, I should sin against that veil if I were to pretend that I could tell you what the sorrow was which oppressed the Saviour's soul: only so far can I speak as it has been given me to have fellowship with him in his sufferings. Have you ever felt a deep and overwhelming horror of sin—your own sin and the sins of others? Have you ever seen sin in the light of God's love? Has it ever darkly hovered over your sensitive conscience? Has an unknown sense of wrath crept over you like midnight gloom; and has it been about you, around you, above you, and within you? Have you felt shut up in your feebleness, and yet shut out from God? Have you looked around and found no help, no comfort even in God—no hope, no peace? In all this you have sipped a little of that salt sea into which our Lord was cast. If, like Abraham, you have felt a horror of great darkness creep over you, then have you had a taste of what your divine Lord suffered when it pleased

the Father to bruise him and to put him to grief. This it was that made him sweat great drops of blood falling to the ground; and this it was which on the cross made him utter that appalling cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" It was not the crown of thorns, or the scourge, or the cross which made him cry, but the darkness, the awful darkness of desertion which oppressed his mind and made him feel like one distraught. All that could comfort him was withdrawn, and all that could distress him was piled upon him. "The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?" Our Saviour's spirit was wounded, and he cried, "My heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels." Of all natural and spiritual comfort he was bereft, and his distress was utter and entire. The darkness of Calvary did not, like an ordinary night, reveal the stars; but it darkened every lamp of heaven. His strong crying and tears denoted the deep sorrow of his soul. He bore all it was possible for his capacious mind to bear, though enlarged and invigorated by union with the Godhead. He bore the equivalent of hell; nay, not that only, but he bore that which stood instead of ten thousand hells so far as the vindication of the law is concerned. Our Lord rendered in his death agony a homage to justice far greater than if a world had been doomed to destruction. When I have said that, what more can I say? Well may I tell you that this unutterable darkness, this hiding of the Divine face, expresses more of the woes of Jesus than words can ever tell.

Again, I think I see in that darkness, also *what it was that Jesus was battling with*; for we must never forget that the cross was a battle-field to him, wherein

he triumphed gloriously. He was fighting then with darkness; with the powers of darkness of which Satan is the head; with the darkness of human ignorance, depravity, and falsehood. The battle thus apparent at Golgotha has been raging ever since. Then was the conflict at its height; for the chief of the two great armies met in personal conflict. The present battle in which you and I take our little share is as nothing compared with that wherein all the powers of darkness in their dense battalions hurled themselves against the Almighty Son of God. He bore their onset, endured the tremendous shock of their assault, and in the end, with shout of victory, he led captivity captive. He by his power and Godhead turned midnight into day again, and brought back to this world a reign of light which, blessed be God, shall never come to a close. Come to battle again, ye hosts of darkness, if ye dare! The cross has defeated you: the cross shall defeat you. Hallelujah! The cross is the ensign of victory; its light is the death of darkness. The cross is the lighthouse which guides poor weather-beaten humanity into the harbor of peace: this is the lamp which shines over the door of the great Father's house to lead his prodigals home.

Let us not be afraid of all the darkness which besets us on our way home, since Jesus is the light which conquers it all.

The darkness never came to an end till the Lord Jesus broke the silence. All had been still, and the darkness had grown terrible. At last he spoke, and his voice uttered a psalm. It was the twenty-second Psalm. "My God," saith he, "my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Each repeated "Eloi" flashed morning upon the scene. By the time he had uttered the cry,

“Why hast thou forsaken me?” men had begun to see again, and some even ventured to misinterpret his words, more in terror than in ignorance. They said, “He calleth Elias:” they may have meant a mock, but I think not. At any rate there was no heart in what they said, nor in the reply of their fellows. Yet the light had come by which they could see to dip the sponge in vinegar. Brethren, no light will ever come to dark hearts unless Jesus shall speak; and the light will not be clear until we hear the voice of his sorrows on our behalf, as he cries, “Why hast thou forsaken me?” His voice of grief must be the end of our griefs: his cry out of the darkness must cheer away our gloom, and bring the heavenly morning to our minds.

You see how much there is in my text. It is a joy to speak on such a theme when one is in good health, and full of vigor; then are we as Naphtali, a hind let loose; then give we goodly words: but this day I am in pain as to my body, and my mind seems frozen. Nevertheless, the Lord can bless my feeble words, and make you see that in this darkness there is meaning deep and wide which none of should neglect. If God shall help your meditations this darkness will be light about you.

IV. I come to my fourth point, and my closing words will deal with THE SYMPATHY WHICH PROPHESES. Do you see the sympathy of nature with her Lord—the sympathy of the sun in the heavens with the Sun of Righteousness? It was not possible for him by whom all things were made to be in darkness, and for nature to remain in the light.

The first sympathetic fact I see is this: *all lights are dim when Christ shines not.* All is dark when he does not shine. In the church, if Jesus be not there, what is

there? The sun itself could not yield us light if Jesus were withdrawn. The seven golden lamps are ready to go out unless he walks among them, and trims them with the holy oil. Brethren, you soon grow heavy, and your spirits faint, and your hands are weary, if the Christ be not with you. If Jesus Christ be not fully preached, if he be not with us by his Spirit, then everything is in darkness. Obscure the cross, and you have obscured all spiritual teaching. You cannot say, "We will be perspicuous in every other point, and clear upon every other doctrine, but we will shun the atonement, since so many cavil at it. No, sirs, if that candle be put under a bushel the whole house is dark. All theology sympathizes with the cross, and is colored and tintured by it. Your pious service, your books, your public worship, will all be in sympathy with the cross one way or another. If the cross is in the dark, so will all your work be.

"What think ye of Christ? is the test
To try both your work and your scheme;
You cannot be right in the rest,
Unless you think rightly of him."

Conjure up your doubts; fabricate your philosophies; and compose your theories: there will be no light in them if the cross be left out. Vain are the sparks of your own making, you shall lie down in sorrow. All our work and travail shall end in vanity unless the work and travail of Christ be our first and sole hope. If you are dark upon that point, which alone is light, how great is your darkness!

Next, see the dependence of all creation upon Christ, as evidenced by its darkness when he withdraws. It was not meet that he who made all worlds should die, and yet all worlds should go on just as they had done. If

he suffers eclipse, they must suffer eclipse too: if the Sun of Righteousness be made to set in blood, the natural sun must keep touch with him. I believe, my friends, that there is a much more wonderful sympathy between Christ and the world of nature than any of us have ever dreamed. The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now, because Christ in the Church is in his travail pangs. Christ in his mystical body is in travail, and so the whole creation must wait for the manifestation of the Son of God. We are waiting for the coming of the Lord from heaven, and there is no hill or dale, there is no mountain or sea, but what is in perfect harmony with the waiting church. Wonder not that there should be earthquakes in divers places, blazing volcanoes, terrible tempests, and sore spreading of deadly disease. Marvel not when you hear of dire portents, and things that make one's heart to quail, for such things must be till the end shall come. Until the great Shepherd shall make his crook into a sceptre, and shall begin his unsuffering reign, this poor earth must bleed at every vein. There must be darkness till these days of delay are ended. You that expect placid history till Christ shall come, expect you know not what. You that think that generous politics shall create order and content, and that the extension of free-trade shall breathe universal peace over the nations, look for the living among the dead. Till the Lord shall come, the word has gone out, "Overturn, overturn, overturn," and overturned all things must be, not only in other kingdoms, but in this also, till Jesus comes. All that can be shaken shall be shaken, and only his immovable throne and truth shall abide. Now is the time of the

Lord's battle with darkness, and we may not hope as yet for unbroken light.

Dear friends, the sin which darkened Christ and made him die in the dark, darkens the whole world. The sin that darkened Christ and made him hang upon the cross in the dark is darkening you who do not believe in him, and you will live in the dark and die in the dark unless you get to him who only is the light of the world, and can give light to you. There is no light for any man except in Christ; and till you believe in him thick darkness shall blind you, and you shall stumble in it and perish. That is the lesson I would have you learn.

Another practical lesson is this : If we are in the dark at this time, if our spirits are sunk in gloom, let us not despair, for the Lord Christ himself was there. If I have fallen into misery on account of sin, let me not give up all hope, for the Father's Well-beloved passed through denser darkness than mine. O believing soul, if thou art in the dark thou art near the King's cellars, and there are wines on the lees well refined lying there. Thou hast gotten into the pavilion of the Lord, and now mayest thou speak with him. You will not find Christ in the gaudy tents of pride, nor in the foul haunts of wickedness: you will not find him where the viol, and the dance, and the flowing bowl, inflame the lusts of men, but in the house of mourning you will meet the Man of Sorrows. He is not where Herodias dances, nor where Bernice displays her charms; but he is where the woman of a sorrowful spirit moves her lips in prayer. He is never absent where penitence sits in darkness and bewails her faults.

“Yes, Lord, in hours of gloom,
When shadows fill my room,
When pain breathes forth its groans,
And grief its sighs and moans,
Then thou art near.”

If you are under a cloud, feel after your Lord, if haply you may find him. Stand still in your black sorrow, and say, “O Lord, the preacher tells me that thy cross once stood in such darkness as this—O Jesus, hear me!” He will respond to you; the Lord will look out of the pillar of cloud, and shed a light upon you. “I know their sorrows,” saith he. He is no stranger to heart-break. Christ also once suffered for sin. Trust him, and he will cause his light to shine upon you. Lean upon him, and he will bring you up out of the gloomy wilderness into the land of rest. God help you to do so!

Last Monday I was cheered beyond all I can tell you by a letter from a brother who had been restored to life, light, and liberty by the discourse of last Sabbath morning. I know no greater joy than to be useful to your souls. For this reason, I have tried to preach this morning, though I am quite unfit for it physically. Oh, I do pray I may hear more news from saved ones! Oh that some spirit that has wandered out into the dark moorland may spy the candle in my window, and find its way home! If you have found my Lord, I charge you never let him go, but cleave to him till the day break, and the shadows flee away. God help you so to do, for Jesus' sake! Amen

VI.

MYSTERIOUS MEAT.

May 23, 1886.

“In the mean while his disciples prayed him saying, Master, eat. But he said unto them, I have meat to eat that ye know not of. Therefore said the disciples one to another, Hath any man brought him ought to eat? Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work. Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields, for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal, that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together. And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth. I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labor: other men labored, and ye are entered into their labors.”—JOHN iv. 31—38.

THE disciples had gone away into the city to buy meat, and for this they cannot be censured. It was necessary that food should be provided, and it naturally fell to their lot to perform that duty. Do not say that they were carnal or unspiritual because of this, for the most spiritual people must eat to live. When they came back from making their purchases, they found their Master sitting by the well, as they had left him. They naturally expected that he would be as ready to partake of the provision as they were to offer it to him; but he made no movement in that direction. His mind was evidently far away from the idea of food. He was absorbed in something else, and therefore his disciples sought to call him back to a sense of his need. I do not suppose that they had themselves eaten; it

was hardly like them to do so while their Lord was not with them. They therefore themselves wished to eat, and they were all the more struck with the fact that he had no care for refreshment. Knowing how weary he had been when they left him—so weary that he bade them go alone into the city—they were perplexed at his indifference to food, and perhaps judged that he was over-fatigued, and therefore they prayed him to eat. Inopportunely, one after another said, “Good Master, it is long since thou hast eaten; the way has been weary, the day is hot, thou seemest very faint; we pray thee eat a little, that thou mayest be revived. The woman to whom thou spakest has gone; thy good work for a while is over; let us eat together.”

Again I confess that I do not agree with those who blame these disciples. If it be true that there is nothing very elevated in providing food, there is certainly nothing unworthy in the act. I admire their care for their Master; I praise them for so lovingly pressing upon him the supply of his necessities. It is right for the spiritual man to forget his hunger, but it is equally right for his true friends to remind him that he ought to eat for his health's sake; it is commendable for the worker to forget his weakness and press forward in holy service; but it is proper for the human and thoughtful to interpose with a word of caution, and to remind the ardent spirit that his frame is but dust. I think the disciples did well to say, “Master, eat.” What is more, I will hold them up to your imitation. Jesus has gone from you now in actual person, but his mystical body is still with you, and if you meet with any part of his body in need, make it your earnest care. Still pray him, saying, “Master, eat.” If you know any of his people in poverty, ask them to partake of your abun-

dance, lest haply your Lord should say to you at the last, "I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink." Our Lord's spirituality is not of that visionary sort which despises the feeding of hungry bodies. Look after his poor and needy ones. How can you be truly spiritual if you do not so? "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." There is much in the commonplace attentions of charity: Jesus commands our consideration of the weaknesses and needs of others; and therefore I say again, I commend the disciples that they prayed him, saying, "Master, eat."

Having done this justice to the twelve, let us do higher honor to the divine One about whom they gathered. His mind was at that time absorbed in spiritual objects: and being so, he wished to lead them into that higher field wherein he himself was so much at home, and therefore he transfigured their common words by giving them a higher meaning. "Ye pray me to eat," said he; but "I have meat to eat that ye know not of." They did not comprehend what he meant: as the Samaritan woman did not understand him when he spake of water, neither did his disciples when he spake of meat; but you see the Lord endeavored to use the lower expression as a ladder to something higher and more spiritual. This was the Master's way from the beginning to the end, always to be making similitudes of things seen to set forth the things unseen; always to take the thing which men had grasped and use it as the means of helping them to lay hold on some great truth which as yet was out of their reach. Inasmuch as refreshments were

spoken of, and his disciples saw the need of those refreshments, the Master turns that thought into a deeper channel, and tells them of other refreshments which he himself enjoyed and wished them to share with him. In effect, our Lord's reply to the request, "Master, eat," is this: "I have eaten in the best sense, and I wish you also to eat with me." He would have them enter into that service which had yielded so intense a satisfaction to himself; he would have them know his joy in it.

This morning the run of my subject will be just this: first, *there are refreshments for our hearts which are but little known*—"I have meat to eat that ye know not of." Secondly, *these refreshments satisfied our Lord*—so satisfied him that he forgot to eat bread; and thirdly, and a very practical thirdly I hope it will be, *let us seek these refreshments at once that we too may forget our earthly needs in a heavenly enthusiasm*. O blessed Spirit of all grace, give us secret, sacred food this morning while meditating upon this theme!

I. FIRST, THERE ARE REFRESHMENTS WHICH ARE LITTLE KNOWN. Generally men know enough about refreshments of the body. Those questions—What shall we eat, and what shall we drink?—have been long and carefully studied. It seems obvious to all men that if we are to be restored and lifted above fatigue or weakness it must be by corporeal food. Yet there is in the Word of God an intimation of another principle; as we read, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God shall man live." The Lord has been pleased to make it generally necessary that the body should be sustained with food, but that is only because the body is to be destroyed, for it is written, "Meats for the body, and

the body for meats: but God shall destroy both it and them." That new body, which will never be destroyed, will probably need no meats. If God so willed it, this frame might be sustained without visible food. There is no absolute necessity that the order of nature or of providence should be just as it is. Even now we know that there are many ways by which waste can be suspended, and the need of food greatly lessened; and there are conditions under which life has been sustained upon an almost incredibly small portion of food. If God willed it, he could secretly infuse strength into the system, keeping the lamp of life burning by means of a subtle, invisible oil. We are not so absolutely dependent upon the bread we eat as at first sight seems: food is but the vehicle of sustenance; God could sustain us without it,

Now, brethren, our Lord Jesus Christ found for himself a sustenance other than that of food: a food superior to the ordinary meat of men. But these refreshments were not known to his disciples. The common ruck of mankind have no idea of spiritual food; but the disciples were not of the common ruck; they were chosen out of the world, and they had been with their Lord for some little time, and yet they had not grasped the idea of a man being fed and strengthened by an influence upon his spiritual nature which could raise him above the down-dragging of his bodily needs. They could not yet enter into their Lord's secret: he had a meat to eat which even they knew not of.

The reason for his knowing what they knew not was in part the fact that *this nourishment was enjoyed upon a higher plane than these servants of Christ had yet reached.* They were spiritual men in some degree; but

they were not highly spiritual: they were mere babes in grace, though men in physical development. They had not yet reached to the height of letting their spirits rule the rest of their nature, nor had they yet learned the proper occupation of their spirits. They could not yet enjoy spiritual meat to the full, because they were so little spiritual. Our Saviour was full of the Holy Ghost, and in his inmost nature he was deeply and intensely spiritual, and lived in constant communion with invisible things; and hence it was that he perceived that "meat to eat" which they knew not of. Oh, that we may not miss the delicacies of heaven from lack of a purified taste! It is a sad ignorance which comes of lack of spirituality. The Lord lift us out of it.

Further, these refreshments were unknown to the apostles as yet, because *they implied a greater sinking of self* than they as yet knew. "My meat," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him that sent me." How condescendingly does our Lord sink himself in this expression! He does not even say, "My meat is to do my Father's will." He takes a lower position than that of sonship, and dwells chiefly upon his mission, its service, and the absorption in the will of God which it involved. He finds his refreshment in being the commissioned officer of God, and in carrying out that commission. In being a servant, obeying the will, and doing the work of another, he feels himself so much at home that it revives him to think of it. Others have been refreshed by gaining honor for themselves; our Lord is refreshed by laying that honor aside. The carnal mind finds its meat and drink in self-will, but Christ in doing the will of God. Doing his own work, and carrying out his own purpose, is the meat and the

drink of the natural man : the very opposite was the joy of our Lord Jesus. Is it so with thee, my hearer, that thou wilt have thine own way, and be thine own lord and master? Thou feedest upon wind. Very emptiness thou seekest after, and in the end thy hunger shall devour thee. But oh, believer, hast thou ever tried thy Lord's plan? Hast thou taken thy Lord's yoke upon thee, and learned of him? Thus it is that thou shalt find rest unto thy soul. Not in self, but in self-surrender, is there fulness for the heart. You are no longer to live unto yourself; for you are not your own, but you are the servant of him who has bought you with a price: you will find peace in taking up your proper place. Your life-work is henceforth not to be one of your own selecting, but the work which your great Lord and Master has chosen for you. Servants lay their wills aside, and do what they are bidden. When a man gets fully into this condition I bear witness that he will be refreshed by it. If I felt that my calling were of my own choosing, and that my message were of my own inventing, I should have no rest; the responsibility would crush me: but now that I feel that I am doing the will of him that sent me, and know that I am committed wholly to the work of the Lord, I pluck up courage, and put my shoulder to the wheel without misgiving. In the name of him who has sent me to do this work I find a fountain of fresh strength. But, brothers, we must get low down; we must come right away from the idea of being originals and inventing something and carrying out a novel purpose of our own; we must act only upon commission; we must say only our Lord's words, and do only his work, and then we shall eat of that same loaf on which Jesus fed when he had food to eat which even

the twelve knew not of. When we get to know that we are sent of the Most High there is nourishment in that very fact. We need to feel that as the Father hath sent Christ into the world, even so hath Christ sent us into the world ; and if we do not so feel, we shall miss a choice form of spiritual meat.

Further, our Lord not only lived on a higher plane, and felt a greater sinking of self, but *he was in fuller harmony with God than his disciples*. He says, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." God's will was his will, not only passively, but actively, so that he wished to do it; God's work was his work completely, so that he wished to finish it. He longed to go all the length of God's eternal purpose, and carry it as far as that purpose concerned himself. Now, when a man feels, "My one desire is that I may do God's will; I have no other will but his will; my own will has fallen into God's will as a brook falls into a river" — then he is at peace. It is a blessed thing to rejoice in being crossed in our own purpose, in order that the purpose of the Lord may be more completely fulfilled. When a man wants to do God's work, and to get through with it, whatever it may cost, he is sure to feel strength in his heart. He who will glorify God, whatever it may cost him, is a happy man. He that serves God in body, soul, and spirit, to the utmost of his power, finds new power given to him hour by hour, for God opens to him fresh springs. Perhaps you do not see this truth; but if you have ever experienced what it is to lay your whole soul on the altar, and feel that for Christ you live and for Christ you would die, why then you will know by experience that I speak the truth. If your heart's desires were as ravenous as that of the young lions when they howl for their prey,

they would be abundantly satisfied by your soul's being tamed into complete submission to the will of God. When your will is God's will, you will have your will; when your will rings out in harmony with the will of God, there must be sweetest music all around your steps. Our chief sorrows spring from the roots of our selfishness. Hang up self before the face of the sun, as Joshua hung up the Canaanitish kings, and your soul will no longer be consumed with the hunger and thirst of discontent. When you are tuned to perfect harmony with God, you begin your heaven upon earth, even though your lot be cast in the hut of poverty, or on the bed of sickness. I know by experience that the way to renew your strength for suffering or for service is to become more and more at one with the will and the purpose of the Most High. As God's glory becomes the one object of life, we find in him our all in all.

Once more: our dear Saviour was sustained by these secret refreshments, because *he understood the art of seeing much in little*. Our Master had been feasting. He had partaken of a more than royal banquet. How? He had been made a blessing to a woman—an ill-famed, much sinning woman. He had led her up to the point at which she could perceive that he was the Messiah; this was to him a festival. Some would have thought it a trifle; but as a wise man sees a forest in an acorn, so did Jesus see grand results in this little incident. Many a man would say, "I could easily forget hunger and a thousand other inconveniences if called to preach to a vast congregation like that which assembles in the Tabernacle. It ought to inspire a man to see so many faces." But note well that it inspired your Master to see only one face, and

that the common-place face of a villager of mournful character, who had come forth from Sychar with her water-pot upon her head. It was not an oration that he delivered; he had not even preached a sermon which would command admiration as a master-piece of eloquence, and yet his whole soul was absorbed in what he had done. It was only a talk such as a city missionary would have at any door, or such as would naturally fall from a Bible-woman in her calls from room to room; yet our divine Exemplar saw so much in one soul, and so much valued one opportunity of enlightening it, that he felt a sacred satisfaction in his simple conversation. He saw in the woman the seed-corn of a harvest, and therefore drew a large refreshment from her conversion. We do not usually measure things rightly: I am persuaded that our weights and scales are out of order. We think we are doing a great deal when we get into a big controversy, or write an article that is read all over the nation, or create a sensation which startles thousands. But, indeed, it is not so. The Lord is not in the wind, nor in the tempest: we must go on with the small voice of loving instruction and persuasion. You must go on talking with your little children in your classes; you must go on speaking to the few sick persons you are able to visit; you must try and preach Jesus Christ in little rooms, or to dozens and scores in the street corner or on the village green. It is the old-fashioned, quiet personal work which is effectual. If we get to think that everything must be big to be good, we shall get into a sorry state of mind. In the little bit of work thoroughly well done God is glorified, much more than in the great scheme that is scamped. That word *scamped* gives a true description of very much Christian work

nowadays. A huge piece of moral architecture is carried out by jerry-builders, to whom appearance is everything, and reality is nothing. It tumbles down before long, and then its authors begin again in the same wretched manner, with the same flourish of trumpets, and bragging of what is going to be done. It is worth while to spend a year upon the conversion of a single woman, ay, worth while to spend a lifetime on the conversion of a single child, if it be soundly done; and there might more come of the true conversion of that woman or child than of all your noise and shouting over a hundred supposititious conversions, forced by excitement like mushrooms in a hotbed. We want real work, not noisy work: work done in the centre of the soul of man, such as Jesus did upon the well. This sort of work will bring refreshment to our spirit, and any other will end in bitter disappointment. I am sure if we are content to do little things in the power of the great God, we shall find our meat therein. Some one here gets up and says, "I see, I see. I always thought that ministers and other workers who are always before the public would have most joy; but now I see that there is a reward for the obscure and hidden worker." The Lord Jesus Christ was satisfied to sit by a well and talk to one; be you satisfied henceforth to keep on with your mother's meeting, or your tract district, or your Bible-class, or your family of little ones. Plod away; for infinite possibilities lie concealed within the least work done for Jesus in the power of the Holy Ghost by a sincere heart. Perfume which may fill the halls of princes lies asleep within a tiny rosebud. Despise no little service; but be grateful for permission to render it.

Thus the Master found satisfying meat—meat little known even by his disciples, and therefore he said, “I have meat to eat that ye know not of.”

II. Advance with me, dear friends, to our second theme: THESE SECRET REFRESHMENTS SATISFIED OUR LORD. I bring this forward to remind you that where he found refreshment we also should find it. Why did it satisfy our Lord to be doing the will of him that sent him, and to be finishing his work?

Well, first, because he *had so long hungered to be at it*. For thousands of years the Christ had longed to be here among men. He said, “My delights were with the sons of men.” Before he actually appeared in human flesh and blood, our Lord made many appearances in different forms, because he was eager to be at his work; and when he was born, while he was yet a boy, he said, “Wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?” This was the spirit of him all his life long. “I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened until it be accomplished”? He longed to be at work saving men; he hungered to perform his chosen deeds of mercy. Read in the second chapter of John at the seventeenth verse. He went into the temple and he purged it; and, then we read, “His disciples remembered that it was written of him, the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.” That was before he had told them that it was his meat to do the will of him that sent him. Our Lord was full of such zeal to be serving God and blessing men, that when he did get at it, he was so joyful that everything else fell into the background as if it were not worth a thought. If you and I felt our Lord’s anxiety to be serving God

and winning souls, we should find refreshment in the service itself, even as he did.

When our Lord did get at his work, he gave himself wholly up to it ; he went in for soul-winning heart and soul. There was a wonderful concentration of purpose about our Saviour. His face is always steadfastly set to his work; he is instant and constant in it; he is all there, and always there. Time was—and I hope the time has gone for ever—when there were professed ministers of Jesus Christ whose hearts were in the hunting-field. Do you wonder that their ministry was a scandal? Others have been naturalists first, and divines afterwards. Do you wonder that their ministry proved to be a failure? Time was, and time is, I am sorry to say, when many professed ministers of Christ have their hearts more set upon criticising the gospel than preaching it; they are more at home in scattering doubts than in promoting faith. They preach what they are not sure of, and what they have no interest in. It is not their meat to do the Lord's will, for he never sent them. They get their meat by preaching, but it is not their meat to preach. Surely it must be misery to them to have to tell out an old tale which in their souls they despise. Wretches that they are! I cannot call them better. It seems an awful thing to me that a man should profess to be a servant of Christ, and not put his heart into the Redeemer's service. You may go and sell your calicoes, and your teas, and your sugars, if you like, half-heartedly, it will not spoil your calicoes or your teas: but if you preach the gospel half-heartedly, that is another business. You will spoil every bit of what you preach. What good can come of half-hearted preaching?

And you, good friends, who teach in the school, or do any work for Jesus, remember you spoil with that touch of yours all the work you do if your hand is numbed with a cold indifference. If your soul is not in what you do you had better leave it undone; you will do mischief rather than service unless your heart be in it. When Jesus talks with that woman, he is every bit of him there. He avails himself of every opportunity, and catches up every chance. He converses like a master of the art of teaching, because teaching is the master passion of his soul. Now, brethren, when we get to work like that we shall be refreshed by it. If you do what you do not like to do, it will be weariness to you; but if your work is the joy of your heart, you will find in the doing of it that you have meat to eat that idlers know nothing of.

Our Lord found great joy in the work itself. I believe it was an intense delight to him to be telling about that living water to a thirsty soul. It was a high pleasure to him to be liberating a spirit which had so long been shut up in prison; to be creating new thoughts in a mind which had long grovelled in the mire of sin. How pleased he was to hear the woman say to him, "Whence, then, hast thou that living water?" What a host of thoughts it stirred up in his own soul! The woman had given him to drink, though she had not let her water pot down into the well. It was such glad, such happy work to him to be doing good that it was its own reward.

I think the Lord forgot to eat bread that day partly because of *the enthusiasm which filled him in the pursuit of that soul.* The chamois-hunter quits his couch long before the sun is up, and climbs the mountains. He

watches from the first gray light for the creature which is the object of his pursuit. Ask him how it is when he returns late in the evening that he has had nothing to eat all day long. He answers, "I never thought of it: I saw a chamois on a distant crag and I hastened after it. I leaped the ravines, I climbed the steep faces of the rocks. I sprang down again; I was almost on my prey, but it was gone. I crept up within range again, holding my breath lest the scent of me should alarm the watchful chamois. I thought of nothing but my sport; and I never knew what hunger meant until my bullet found its mark in the heart of my prey, and I had drawn out my hunting-knife. It was not until I began to lift the game to my shoulder that I bethought me that I had neither eaten nor drunk that day. You understand what this enthusiasm means and how it refreshes the hunter. Some of you have been salmon fishing in the Scotch rivers; you have fished on and on until you have hooked a huge fish, and by the time you have landed him, on taking out your watch, you discover that it is long past your dinner hour, and you are surprised that you had not noticed that you were almost faint. Your excitement kept you going: only when it was over did you begin to hunger. Thus the Master was so taken up with soul-saving that he had meat to eat that others knew not of. I hope we sometimes get into this state of entire absorption under the influence of a burning desire to bring sinners away from sin to their Saviour, and lead them to put their trust in him who is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him. I see the riddle all unriddled. They said, "Master, eat," but I see that he had meat to eat that

they knew not of; for the enthusiasm of soul-winning was strong upon him.

Moreover, the Master had not only felt the enthusiasm of pursuit, but *he was moved greatly by the sympathy of pity.* The man that hunts the chamois has no sympathy with his prey, the man who would take his salmon has no pity for the creature; but he that labors to bless souls is full of tenderness. Many noble women love nursing the sick. Their hearts are at home at the bedside of the suffering. They do not sleep at night while pain needs relief, and cold sweat needs to be wiped away. Their tender pity gives them a more than ordinary power of endurance. They watch and wait hour after hour. Exhaustion comes at last to them, and then they begin to inquire of themselves, "How was it I held out so long?" Generous sympathy conquered fatigue. How mothers can and do endure with sick children! They feel that they cannot sleep while the dear one tosses to and fro in fever, or moans in pain! They have lost all care for eating while they guard the brittle thread which threatens so soon to snap. Real sympathy seems as if it swallowed up everything else, as Aaron's rod swallowed up all the other rods. Sometimes you have seen suffering which you could not help, and you have come away forgetful of all else but the dreadful scene. You loathed the sight of food; you were sick at heart; the sorrow had become your own. You started in your sleep weeks afterwards, for the person wounded in the accident had come before you. Thus was our Saviour carried away with pity for lost souls; he knew the danger of that Samaritan city, and that thought caused him to forget to eat.

More than that: it was not only sympathy, *he felt great joy in present success.* He delighted to see that he had led a soul into life and light. He had the bliss of seeing a sinful woman believe in the Messiah; and of knowing that her heart and life would thus be purified. I do not know anything that can make a man forget his pain and weariness like grasping the hand of a sinner saved. "Oh," saith the saved one, "God Almighty bless you! you have brought me to Jesus." This nerves us to new effort. I speak here from experience, for yesterday evening, when I was thinking of this subject, I was myself somewhat dull through pain and weakness, and as God would have it, I took up the Report of the Baptist Missionary Society, which will be issued to you on the first of June, and as I glanced over it, I saw my own name. It seems that our missionary in San Domingo has had a discouraging year, but it was lighted up with one most pleasing incident. A man had come down from the interior of Hayti to ask for baptism. Finding him to be a most intelligent Christian, well instructed in the gospel, the missionary asked how he came to know anything about it. In reply he told him that he had fallen in with a sermon translated into the French language which was preached by Mr. Spurgeon. O friends, I was dull no longer. I had meat to eat. Had an angel stood in the study, I could not have felt more delighted with his visit than I did when I read of a sinner saved. Here was a sermon translated into French, which was carried far away to Hayti, I do not know how, and there was read by a Romanist, who found by it salvation. God bless him! You cannot faint after such a success; can you? As for myself, despite my sickness, I resolved to go on again, preach with all my might, and print more ser-

mons, and send them out to the ends of the earth. Brethren, never say die. Never dream of giving up. Let God's blessing on your work refresh you.

To complete the list, the blessed Master had something else which made him forget hunger: it was that *he saw the prospect of better things*. Inquirers were coming out of the city; that one female missionary had gone back and told her story, and the men were coming to hear what Jesus had to say. Our Lord also with prescient eye beheld the day when Philip the Evangelist would go down to Samaria, and when many Samaritans would be brought to the knowledge of the truth. O friends, let us open our eyes and find refreshment in what God is about to do! Let us have bright views of the future. The gospel which has saved twenty can save twenty thousand. The same kind of preaching which has blessed this one congregation can bless all congregations. We have only to exercise more faith in it, and proclaim it with greater confidence, and make it more our life-work to proclaim it, and the world shall yet come to Jesus' feet, and the old, old gospel now despised shall yet again be had in honor. Let us be of good cheer. If we do but serve God as Jesus served him, we shall have meat to eat that will fully satisfy us, as it did our Lord.

III. Thirdly, LET US AT ONCE SEEK THIS REFRESHMENT. That is our practical business. If there is meat to eat that we know not of, let us try to know of it at once. I am speaking, of course, only to you who are converted, and are thus saved by faith in Jesus Christ. You who are not yet believers cannot eat of this secret meat, for you are not alive unto God; you need to be quickened by the Spirit of our God; you must be born again before you can eat the bread of heaven. May

the Lord lead you to saving faith in Jesus Christ at once! But I speak to you that know the Lord, you who labor for him, and need to be refreshed this day. Look you to the right place for nourishment. Are we weary? Then let us seek refreshment by following out the directions of our Lord in the text before us.

First, *let us remember that we are sent of God.* Do not forget that. Say with your Lord, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me." Each redeemed one is sent forth by his Redeemer. I do not know what the Lord has sent *you* to do. I hope you know that each man for himself; but when you know what work you are called to do, do not be held back by any one; wait for no man's consent, patronage, or help. Strengthen your soul upon the persuasion that God has sent you, and then go forward. If God has sent you, who can stand against you? A Queen's messenger claims that we clear the road for him. An officer who bears the Queen's authority is authorized to lay all persons under orders to speed him. He who rides on royal business has precedence over all others. Get to feel, Christian friend, that Jesus has sent you, and herein will lie food for your courage. Know that you have a mission, and go at it; and let it be unsafe for any one to stand in your way. Let opposers know that somebody will have to clear out; for if God sent you, in that sending there is a force and an energy which nothing can safely resist. Do not make a noise. Forbear all blustering; but quietly set yourself to work. If God has sent you, you will be like the greater Sent One, of whom we read, "He shall not strive, nor cry, nor cause his voice to be heard in the streets," but at the same time "he shall not fail, nor be discouraged."

Next, if we desire to be refreshed, let us *find joy at*

once in God's work and will. You have been trying to find joy and refreshment in your own work and your own will, and you have failed; come, then, and sail in another direction. But upon this I have already spoken. If all the work you and I have to do can be made to be God's work, if we will do all things to his glory, whether it be mending of shoes, or making garments, or preaching sermons, or ploughing of fields, then shall we be happy in God, and our souls shall be fed upon the finest of the wheat. No drudgery remains when the lowliest labor is seen to be part of a priestly service. When the meanest work glows with the glory of a divine call, there is refreshment in it. I am sure I am directing you in the right way to find sweet morsels for your heart, when I urge you to have joy in God's work rather than in your own.

Next, *let us get to work.* The Master says to his apostles, "Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest." This was a common saying among the lazy. The time for work was never come; they always found reasons for delay; the harvest was always four months off. Many are going to do a lot of work one of these days. Just now they take things easy, but in four months they will let you see how they can labor. We have too many Christian people around us who find no joyful satisfaction in divine things because they do not at once spend themselves for Christ. One inquires, What is the best way to do good? Our answer is, *do it.* I cannot give you any better recommendation. The best way to serve Christ is to serve him. A man who was hungry, when he was asked what was the best way to dine, said, "Give me a knife and fork, and give me a chance, and I will soon show you."

When asked how you can serve God, reply by seizing the first opportunity and doing it. For our joy and comfort be it remembered that opportunities are many and present. "Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest."

Further, if we want to have joy and refreshment in our own Christian life, *let us leap into our place at once*. These disciples were not to be sowers, but reapers. Many others are not to be reapers, but sowers. You must get to work in the place into which the Lord puts you; there must be no picking of positions; you must jump into the saddle and be off. It may be that you say, "I should like to begin an altogether new work," but if the Lord appoints you to go on with the work that some one else has carried on for years, do not hesitate. Perhaps you say, "I should like to labor where the first rough work is done;" but if your Lord directs you to commence on the uncleared forest, do not raise an objection. It may be you wish to carry up the last hod of bricks to put on the chimney; but if the house has not reached that condition yet, be quite as willing to dig out the cellar. We must be willing to hook on anywhere. Be leader or shaft-horse. Be first or last. Be sower or reaper, as the Lord ordains. Dear friends, you will never get refreshment in Christ's service if you bring a dainty self-will into the field and set it to make a selection, for this is contrary to the true spirit of service. Have no choice, and then you will find satisfaction.

If we are to get refreshment for our souls we may also *anticipate the wages*. There is to be a time when

workers together with Christ are to receive wages. The text says, "He that reapeth receiveth wages." In our own country agricultural laborers have been paid so little that we could hardly call it receiving wages; but when harvest time comes, then the reaper is paid, and truly receiveth wages. The hardest-fisted churl must pay for reaping, must he not? Even the most grudging miser must pay his reapers. There must be special money for mower and reaper. Let us work on; for our Master speaks to us of wages, and he always pays liberally. Your reward is not what you get at present; but it lies in the glorious future. When the Lord Jesus comes he will reward all his stewards and servants. No truth is more plain in the four gospels than this fact, that when Jesus returns to this earth he will distribute recompense in proportion to work done. Herein is meat for us to eat which may well sustain us under the burden and heat of the day.

Then cometh the end. If any of you wish to be refreshed, remember the end. What is the end of sowing and the end of reaping? Is it not the completed harvest? See you not the last wagon loaded with grain? See the children on the top there! Hark how the rustics shout their joy as they bring in the precious fruits of the earth! And there is a supper at night. The master has been killing his fatlings, and he invites all his laborers to supper. How they feast with him! Sow on; work on; reap on; for there will come a day when heaven and earth shall be moved with joyous acclamations, because the Lord's purpose is accomplished, and his work is finished. Then shall we sit down at the supper of the Lamb and rejoice together, as many of us as have had a hand

in the blessed work and service in which our Master laid down his life. Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind; be sober, and hope to the end. Be encouraged and refreshed this morning. Feed upon the eternal dainties which are provided for you by your Lord, and be glad in his name.

VII.

REJOICE EVERMORE.

“ Rejoice evermore.”—1 THESSALONIANS v. 16.

THIS is a sunny precept. When we read it we feel that the time of the singing of birds has come. That joy should be made a duty is a sure token of the blessedness of the New Covenant. Because Jesus has suffered, we are encouraged, commanded, and enabled to rejoice. Only the Man of Sorrows and his chosen apostle can teach for a precept such a word as this—“*Rejoice evermore.*” Happy people who can be thus exhorted! We ought to rejoice that there is a command to rejoice. Glory be unto the God of happiness who bids his children be happy. While musing on this text, I seem carried in spirit to the green woods, and their bowers. As in a dell all blue with hair-bells, where the sun smiles down upon me through the half-born oak leaves, I sit me down, and hear the blessed birds of the air piping out their love-notes: their music saith only this—“*Rejoice evermore.*” All that I see, and hear, and feel, surrounds me with garlands of delight; while the fairest of all the shepherds of Sharon sings to me this delicious pastoral—“*Rejoice evermore.*” The very words have breathed spring into my soul, and set my heart a blossoming. Thus am I also made to be as a daffodil which long has hidden away among the clods, but now at last ventures to uplift her yellow lily, and ring out her golden bell. Who can be sad,

or silent, when the voice of the Beloved saith, "*Rejoice evermore?*"

Our apostle speaks of rejoicing as a personal, present, permanent duty, to be carried out by the people of God. The Lord has not left it to our own option whether we will sorrow or rejoice; but he has pinned us down to it by positive injunction—"Rejoice evermore." He will have this cloth of gold spread over the whole field of life. He has laid down as first and last, beginning, middle and end—"Rejoice evermore." Some things are to be done at one time, some at another; but rejoicing is for all times, for ever, and for evermore, which, I suppose, is more than ever, if more can be. Fill life's sea with joy up to high-water mark. Spare not, stint not, when rejoicing is the order of the day. Run out to your full tether; sweep your largest circle when you use the golden compasses of joy.

Some things being once done are done with, and you need not further meddle with them; but you have never done with rejoicing. "Rejoice evermore."

Our text is set in the midst of many precepts. Notice how from the fourteenth verse the apostle packs together a number of duties of Christian ministers and church members one towards another. "We exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, be patient toward all men." All these things are to be done in turn, according as occasion requires; but "*rejoice evermore.*" You have plenty to do; but this thing you have always to do. You shall never be able to fold your hands for want of some holy task or other; but be not worried; be not fretted by what you have to do: on the contrary, take up the sacred duties with alacrity, welcoming each one of them, and entering upon them

with delight. Rejoice in each one, because you “rejoice evermore.” You will have to warn the unruly, and their rebellious tempers will, perhaps, irritate you; or, if in patience you possess your soul, yet you may grow sad at having so melancholy a duty to perform; but be not overmuch troubled, even by the grief of injured love. Warn the unruly, but “*rejoice evermore.*” Do not pause in the blessed service of rejoicing when you are called upon to comfort the feeble-minded. There is danger that the feeble-minded may rob you of your comfort, but let it not be so. In attempting to lift them out of the waters you may, perhaps, be almost drowned yourself; your deliverance will lie in the sweet word, “*Rejoice evermore.*” You will lose your power both to warn the unruly and to comfort the feeble-minded, if you lose your joy. The joy of the Lord will be your strength in all these matters; therefore, “rejoice evermore.” Close at your hand will lie the weak who want supporting, and you may be half saying to yourselves, “We wish that all God’s people were strong, that we might unitedly spend all our strength against the foe, instead of having to use it at home for supporting our own weak soldiery.” But be not dejected on that account; while you are supporting the weak, still “rejoice evermore.” Your rejoicing will be a great support to the faint; your ceasing to rejoice will be a terrible confirmation of their sorrow. Lend the feeble a hand, but do not stop your own singing. Does not a mother carry her babe, and sing at the same time?

As you turn about, you find all men gathering to hinder you, to grieve you, to slander you, or to make use of you for their base purposes. But be not grieved; put up with your poor fellow-creatures, since the

Lord puts up with you, but do not leave off rejoicing. As you are patient towards all men, let your patience have a flavor of joy in it: however great the provocations that you endure, still "*rejoice evermore.*" As it is written, "With all thy sacrifices thou shalt offer salt," so let it be thy settled purpose with every other duty to offer rejoicing. I am sure, brethren, that we make a very great mistake if we get like Martha—cumbered with much serving: for that cumbering prevents our serving the Master well. He loves to see those who serve in his house of a cheerful countenance. He wants not slaves to grace his throne. He would have his children wait upon him with a light in their faces which is the reflection of his own. He would have his joy fulfilled in them, that their joy may be full: it is his royal pleasure that his service should be delight, his worship heaven, his presence glory. Let your hearts be sanctified, but let not your hearts be troubled. Amidst a thousand duties give not way to a single anxiety. While you are desirous to honor God in everything, yet be not overburdened, even with the cares of his cause and service, lest you put forth the hand of Uzza to stay the ark of the Lord. The Lord forbade his priests to wear garments that caused sweat, and he will not have any one of us fret and worry about his cause so as to lose our rest in his own self. Wrestle for a blessing, but still "*rejoice evermore.*"

The command to rejoice is set in the midst of duties; it is put there to teach us how to perform them all.

Also notice that *our text comes after just a flavoring of trouble and bitterness.* Read verse fifteen: "See that none render evil for evil unto any man." Children of God are apt to have evil rendered to them. They

may have slanderous reports spread about them: they may be accused of things they never dreamed of: they may be cut to the heart by the ingratitude of those who ought to have been their friends; but still they are bidden, "*rejoice evermore.*" Even rejoice in the persecution and in the slander. "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." So says our Lord. "Rejoice ye," he says, "and be exceeding glad." There is an expression in the Greek that never has been rendered into English, and never will be—*γαλλιασθε*. Old Trapp half puns upon the *agallias* as he says, "dance a galliard." I do not know what a "galliard" was, but I suppose that it was some very joyous kind of dance. Certainly we know of no better way of translating our Lord's word than by—exult, or leap for joy. Even when your good name shall be tarnished by the malice of the wicked, then you are to leap. When are you to be wretched? Surely despondency is excluded. If slander is to make us dance, when are we to fret? Suppose some other kind of trial should come upon you, you are still to rejoice in the Lord always. The dearest friend is dead: "rejoice evermore." The sweet babe is sickening, the darling of your household will be taken away: "*rejoice evermore.*" Trade is ebbing out, prosperity is disappearing from you, you may even be brought to poverty; but, "rejoice evermore." Your health is affected, your lungs are weak, your heart does not beat with regularity, very soon you may be sick unto death; but, "*rejoice evermore.*" Shortly you must put off this tabernacle altogether! Tokens warn you that you must

soon close your eyes in death; but, "rejoice evermore." There is no limit to the exhortation. It is ever in season. Through fire and through water, through life and through death, "*rejoice evermore.*"

Now and then a commentator says that the command of our text must mean that we are to be in the habit of rejoicing, for there must necessarily be intervals in which we do not rejoice. It is to be "constant but intermittent:" so one good man says. I do not know how that can be, though I know what he means. He means that it ought to be the general tenor of our life that we rejoice: yet he evidently feels that there must be black clouds now and then to vary the abiding sunshine. He warns us that there will be broken bits of road where as yet the steam roller has not forced in the granite. But that will not do as an interpretation of the text; for the apostle expressly says, "Rejoice evermore:" that is, rejoice straight on, and never leave off rejoicing. Whatever happens, rejoice. Come what may, rejoice. If the worst darkens to the worst—if the night lowers into a sevenfold midnight, yet "*Rejoice evermore.*" This carillon of celestial bells is to keep on ringing through the night as well as through the day. "Rejoice, rejoice, ye saints of God, at every time, in every place, and under every circumstance. Joy, joy, for ever. Rejoice evermore. In the midst of a thousand duties, amid the surges of ten thousand trials, still rejoice." There is to be about the Christian a constancy of joy.

I am bound to mention among the curiosities of the churches, that I have known many deeply spiritual Christian people who have been afraid to rejoice. Much genuine religion has been "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought!" Some take such a view of

religion that it is to them a sacred duty to be gloomy. They believe in the holiness of discontent, the sanctity of repining; but they recoil from grateful joy as if it were the devil in the form of an angel of light. One of the commandments of the saints of misery is, "Draw down the blinds on a Sunday." Another is, "Never smile during a sermon: it is wicked." A third precept is, "Never rest yourself, and be sure that you never let anybody else rest for an instant. Why should anybody be allowed a moment's quiet in a world so full of sin? Go through the world and impress people with the idea that it is an awful thing to live." I have known some very good people spoiled for practical usefulness, and spoiled as to being like the Lord Jesus Christ, by their deeply laid conviction that it was wicked to be glad. Well do I remember an earnest Christian woman who saw me when I was first converted, full of the joy of the Lord, and joyfully assured of my salvation in Christ Jesus. She seemed distressed at the sight of so much joy. She shook her head. She looked at me with that heavenly-minded pity which these good people usually lay by in store. It seemed to her a dreadful thing that so young a Christian should dare to know whom he had believed. If you had been a Christian a hundred years you might perhaps begin to think it possible that you were saved; but to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ straight away, like a little child, and at once to rejoice in his salvation, seemed to this dear old Christian woman to be an act of such shocking temerity that she could only shake her dear head and prognosticate all sorts of horrible things. Since then I have found a great many like her; and when I have seen them shake their heads they have not shaken me half so much as she shook my heart on that

first occasion; because I know them now, and I know that there is nothing in that shake of the head after all. The fact is that they ought to shake their heads about themselves for getting into so sad a state, while this text stands on the sacred page, "*Rejoice evermore.*" It cannot be a wise and prudent thing to neglect this plain precept of the word. It cannot be an unsafe thing to do what we are commanded to do. It cannot be a wrong thing for a believer to abide in that state of mind which is recommended by the Holy Spirit in words so plain, and so unguarded, "*Rejoice evermore.*"

Oh, dear friends, you may rejoice. God has laid no embargo upon rejoicing; he puts no restriction upon happiness. Do believe it that you are permitted to be happy. Do believe that there is no ordinance of God commanding you to be miserable. Turn this book over and see if there be any precept that the Lord has given you in which he has said, "Groan in the Lord always, and again I say, groan." You may groan if you like. You have Christian liberty for that; but at the same time, do believe that you have larger liberty to rejoice, for so it is put before you. He bids you rejoice, and yet again he says, "rejoice." Some of God's sheep dare not go into the Lord's own pasture. It is dark and thick with rich and luscious food; and into that field their Shepherd has already led them. Yet they dream that there is a gate, and that gate is shut, and across it is written this word, "Presumption." They are afraid to feed where God has made the best grass to grow for them, because they are afraid of being presumptuous. The fear is groundless, but painfully common. Oh that I could deliver the true believer from this evil influence! If you are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, everything that there is in

Christ is yours. If you are resting in Jesus Christ, though you have only lately begun to trust in him, the whole covenant of grace, with all its infinite supplies, belongs to you, and you have the right to partake of that which grace has provided. Jesus invites you to eat and drink abundantly. Beloved in the Lord, the only sin that you can commit at the banquet of love will be to stint yourselves. The feast is spread by a royal hand, and royal bounty bids you come. Hold not back through shame or fear. Come and satiate your souls with goodness. "Eat ye that which is good and let your soul delight itself in fatness," for so God permits you to do.

But I go a step farther, and that is, that *it is a sin not to rejoice*. I will not say it harshly; I should like to say it as softly and tenderly as it could be put: but it must be said, and I must not take away from the force of it by my tenderness. If it be a command, "Rejoice evermore," then it is a breach of the command not to rejoice evermore. And what is a breach of a command? What is a neglect to obey a precept? Is it not a sin—a sin of shortcoming, though not of transgression? Beloved, why do your faces wear those gloomy colors? Why do you distrust? Why do you mourn? Why are you continually suspicious of the faithfulness of God? Why are you not rejoicing when there is God's word for it, first permitting, and then commanding you? Come, ye unhappy and dolorous professors, question yourselves rather than others. O thou forlorn one, cease to judge those whose eyes flash with exultation. Next time that you meet with a rejoicing Christian, do not begin to chide him, but quietly chide yourself because you do not rejoice. As for you who are swift of foot, I hope that you will not

say an unkind word of poor Mephibosheth, who is lame in both his feet, for he is dear to David, and he shall sit at David's table. But, on the other hand, Mephibosheth in his lameness must grow bitter and censorious, and find fault with Asahel, who is fleet of foot as a young roe, or otherwise it may seem almost too ridiculous. No, no. Heavy-heart, chide not the glad. Glad-heart, deal not roughly with the sorrowful. Bear ye one another's burdens, and share ye one another's joys. If there be any chiding, let it be the chiding of Little-Faith, sorrowfully bemoaning his own weakness of grace. Oh that God would help us to be faithful to our own experiences: then we shall not criticise others, but judge ourselves.

All this by way of introduction.

And now, just for a minute or two, I desire to speak upon THE QUALITY OF THIS REJOICING which is commanded in our text. May the Holy Spirit enable me to set before you the select taste and special quality of a believer's life-long joy! "Rejoice evermore."

Brethren, *this is not a carnal rejoicing*. If it were, it would be impossible to keep it up evermore. There is a joy of harvest; but where shall we find it in winter? There is a joy of wealth; but where is this joy when riches take to themselves wings, and fly away? There is a joy of health; but that is not with us evermore, for the evil days come and the years of weakness and sorrow. There is a joy in having your children round about you; sweet are domestic joys, but these last not for ever. At the house of the happiest knocks the hand of death. No; if your joys spring from earthly fountains, those fountains may be dried up, and then your joys are gone. If the foundation of a man's joy be anywhere on earth, it will be shaken;

for there is a day coming when the whole earth shall shake, and even now it is far from being a stable thing. Build not on the floods; and what are outward circumstances but as waves of the changeful sea? No, beloved, it cannot be carnal joy which is here commanded, since carnal joy in the nature of things cannot be for evermore. I know not that carnal joy is commanded anywhere. Men are permitted to rejoice in the things of this life, but that is the most that we can say. They are forbidden to rejoice too much in these things, for they are as honey, of which a man may soon eat till he is sickened. The joy which God commands is a joy in which it is impossible to go too far. It is a heavenly joy, based upon things which will last for evermore: or else we could not be bidden to "rejoice evermore."

Again, as this joy is not carnal, so I feel quite sure that *it is not presumptuous*. Some persons ought not to rejoice. Did not the prophet Hosea say, "Rejoice not, O Israel, for joy, as other people: for thou hast departed from thy God"? There are some persons who rejoice, and it would be well if a faithful hand were to dash the cup from their lips. They have never fled to Christ for refuge—they have never been born again—they have never submitted themselves to the righteousness of God, and yet they are at ease in Zion. Ah, wretched ease! Many are ignorant of their ruin, strangers to the remedy of grace; strangers to the blood that bought redemption: and yet they rejoice in their own righteousness. They have a joy that has been accumulated through years of false profession, hypocritical formality, and vain pretence. Such as these are not told to "rejoice evermore." There must be sound reasons for rejoicing now, or

there can be no reason for rejoicing evermore. If your joy will not bear looking at, have done with it. If, when you run with the footmen of common self-examinations in time of health, they weary you, what will you do when you contend with the black horsemen of dark thought in the hour of death? The joy that will abide for ever is the joy to be sought after; but joy which a man cannot justify never ought to be thought of as enduring for "evermore." Is your hope fixed on what Jesus did for sinners on the tree? Are you really a partaker of the life that is in him? Have you been begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead? If so, it is safe for you to rejoice at once: and it will be equally safe for you to "rejoice evermore." Is it not clear that the rejoicing commanded in our text is not a presumptuous joy, or a carnal joy?

Again, dear friends, I feel bound to add that *it must not be a fanatical joy*. Certain religious people are of a restless, excitable turn, and never feel good till they are half out of their minds. You would not wonder if their hair should stand bolt upright, like the quills of the fretful porcupine. They are in such a state of mind that they cry "hallelujah" at anything or nothing, for they feel ready to cry, or shout, or jump, or dance. I do not condemn their delirium, but I am anxious to know what goes with it. Come hither, friend; let us have a talk. What do you know? What? Is it possible that I offend you the moment I seek a reason for the hope that is in you? Is it so, that you do not know anything of the doctrines of grace? You were never taught anything; the object of the institution which enlisted you is not to teach you, but only to excite you. It pours boiling water

into you, but it does not feed you with milk. That is a miserable business. We like excitement of a proper kind, and we covet earnestly a high and holy joy, but if our rejoicing does not come out of a clear understanding of the things of God, and if there is no truth at the bottom of it, what does it profit us? Those who rejoice without knowing why can be driven to despair without knowing why; and such persons are likely to be found in a lunatic asylum ere long. The religion of Jesus Christ acts upon truthful, reasonable, logical principles: it is sanctified common sense. A Christian man should only exhibit a joy which he can justify, and of which he can say, "There is reason for it." I pray you, take care that you have joy which you may expect to endure for ever, because there is a good solid reason at the back of it. The excitement of animal enthusiasm will die out like the crackling of thorns under a pot; we desire to have a flame burning on the hearth of our souls which is fed with the fuel of eternal truth, and will therefore burn on for evermore.

I go a little farther, and I say that I believe that this joy which is commanded here, "Rejoice evermore," is *not even that high and divine exhilaration which Christians feel upon special occasions*. We could tell of rapturous ecstasies and sublime joys which, if they be not heaven itself, are so near akin to it, that we would not change them for the place that Gabriel fills when nearest to his Master's throne. Oh, there are times when God's Elijah, having brought down the fire from heaven, girds up his loins and runs before Ahab's chariot with a divine enthusiasm which onlookers cannot understand. There are moments on the top of the mount when Peter is no fool for saying, "Let us build three

tabernacles." It is so good to be there that we would willingly stay in that mount and never come down again to the bustle, and turmoil, and sin of a guilty world. Now, you are not commanded in the text to be always in such a high, exalted, rapturous state of mind as that. "Rejoice evermore," but you cannot always rejoice at that rate. I have said that you cannot, and I mean it literally. There is a physical impossibility in it. The strain upon the mind would be much too great. We could not live in such a condition of excitement and tension. Sometimes we can swim in the deep waters; but who can always swim? We can take to ourselves the wings of eagles, and soar beyond the stars; but we are not condors, and cannot always fly: we are more like the sparrows which find a house near the altar of God. When we cannot mount as on wings, we think it quite sufficient if we can run without weariness, and walk without fainting. The ordinary joy of the Christian is that which is commanded here: it is not the joy of Jubilee but of every year: not the joy of harvest but of all the months. "*Rejoice evermore.*" No, Miriam, no, not always the timbrel. Not every day, "Sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously." There is other work for you. No, Moses, not every day, "thy right hand, O Lord, hath dashed in pieces the enemy." No, you have other work to do amongst those rebels, quite as honoring to your God and quite as useful as writing Israel's triumphal hymn. No, James, and John and Peter, not always on the top of Tabor. Sometimes in the house of death with your Master, where the young girl is raised, and sometimes in Gethsemane to keep watch, if you can, while he sweats great drops of blood. You are to "rejoice evermore," but you are

not always to be clashing the high-sounding cymbals; sometimes the softer psaltery must satisfy your hand. All days are not holidays: there was a day when Job lost his cattle and his children, and yet blessed the name of the Lord. All days are not wedding days: there was a day wherein Jacob cried, "All these things are against me." All days are not as the days of heaven upon earth; and until the day break and the shadows flee away, we shall have to bear about a joy that is rather a lamp in the night than a sun in the day—a joy that gladdens us when we are cast down, rather than lifts us up to ecstasy.

I hope that you catch my thought, though I am afraid that I do but dimly put it. This shows you what kind of joy could not be with us always. The joy that can be with us evermore is a part of ourselves, a power of the new nature which God works in us by his own Spirit. It consists in the great cheerfulness of the new-born disposition; a full conviction that whatever God does is right; a sweet agreement with the providence of God, let it ordain what it will; an intense delight in God himself and in the person of his dear Son; and consequently a quietness, a calm, a stillness of soul, "the peace of God which passeth all understanding." This holy rejoicing is a drop of the essence of heaven. You have heard of "songs without words"; such is the joy of the Lord in the soul: a sort of silent song for ever sung within the spirit; a quiet making of music with every pulse of the heart; a living psalmody before God with every heaving of the lungs. I hope that you know what it means, or that if you do not, you may soon learn. This is a joy that has no wear and tear about it. You can keep from year to year the even tenor of this way; for this is the pace

for which men's minds were made. "*Rejoice evermore.*" You can live to be as old as Methuselah in this frame: for this rejoicing will never tear you to pieces. It will conserve you and act as the salt of your physical, mental and spiritual man.

Thus much upon the quality of this joy.

Suffer a few words upon THE OBJECT OF THIS REJOICING, in order to help you, dear friends, to indulge it. "*Rejoice evermore.*" Wherewith can we keep this feast? What are the objects of such a joy as this?

God helping us, we can always rejoice *in God*. What a God we have! "God my exceeding joy," said the Psalmist. "Delight thyself also in the Lord." Every attribute of God, every characteristic of God, is an inexhaustible gold mine of precious joy to every man who is reconciled to God. Delight thyself in God the Father, and his electing love, and his unchanging grace, and his illimitable power, and his transcending glory; and in thy being his child, and in that providence with which he orders all things for thee. Delight thyself in thy Father God. Delight thyself also in the Son, who is "God with us." God with us or ever the earth was, in the covenant council when he became our surety and our representative. God with us when his delights were with the sons of men. Delight in him as man suffering, sympathizing with you. Delight in him as God putting forth infinite wisdom and power for you. I should need a month in which to give a bare outline of the various points of our Lord's divine and human character which furnish us with objects of joy. Do but think of him. Do but for a moment consider his love, and if you are at all right in heart, it must bring unspeakable pleasure to you.

“Jesus, the very thought of thee
With sweetuess fills my breast.”

Then think of the Holy Ghost, and rejoice in him as dwelling in you, quickening you, comforting you, illuminating you, and abiding with you for ever. Think of the triune God, and be blest.

Then muse upon the covenant of grace; think of redemption by blood; think of divine sovereignty and all that has come of it in the form of grace to men. Think of thy effectual calling, thy justification, thy acceptance in the Beloved. Think of thy final perseverance. Think of thy union with the glorious person of the Well-beloved, and of all the life and all the glory that is wrapped up in that surpassing truth. “Rejoice evermore.” With such a God you have always a source of joy.

I believe, dear friends, that if we are right-minded every doctrine of the gospel will make us glad, every promise of the gospel will make us glad, every precept of the gospel will make us glad. If you were to go over a list of all the privileges that belong to the people of God, you might pause over each one, and say, “I could rejoice evermore in this if I had nothing else.” If ever you fail to rejoice, permit me to exhort you to arouse each one of the graces of the Spirit to its most active exercise. Begin with the first of them—faith. Believe, and as you believe this and that out of the ten thousand blessings which God has promised, joy will spring up in your soul. Have you exercised faith? then lead out the sister grace of hope. Begin hoping for the resurrection, hoping for the second coming, hoping for the glory which is then to be revealed. What sources of joy are these! When you have indulged hope, then go on to love, and let this fairest of

the heavenly sisters point you to the way of joy. Go on to love God more and more, and to love his people, and to love poor sinners; and, as you love, you will not fail to rejoice, for joy is born of love! Love has on her left hand sorrow for the griefs of those she loves, but at her right hand a holy joy in the very fact of loving her fellows; for he that loves doeth a joyful thing. If you cannot get joy either out of hope, or faith, or love, then go on to patience. I believe that one of the sweetest joys under heaven comes out of the severest suffering when patience is brought into play. "Sweet," says Toplady, "to lie passive in thy hand, and know no will but thine." And it is so sweet, so inexpressibly sweet, that to my experience the joy that comes of perfect patience is, under certain aspects, the divinest of all the joys that Christians know this side of heaven. The abyss of agony has a pearl in it which is not to be found upon the mountain of delight. Put patience to her perfect work, and she will bring you the power to rejoice evermore.

I will suppose that you have gone through all this, and that you still say, "I cannot rejoice as I would." Then arise, dear brother, and gird yourself for holy exercise. Begin with prayer. Prayer will make the darkening cloud remove; and then you will rejoice. If supplication is over, and you are not rejoicing, then sing a psalm. "Bring hither the minstrel." Often does holy music set the prophet going. Let us sing a song unto the Lord; and if we have no joy in our hearts already, we shall not have sung very many verses before rejoicing will drop on us like the dew which soaks the dry and dusky tents of the Arabians. If neither prayer nor praise will do it, then read the Word. Sit still and meditate on what the Lord has

spoken. Go up to the Communion table; gather with the people of God in sweet mutual converse; or go out and preach to sinners. Go to the Sunday-school class, and tell the dear children about Christ. In Christian labor you will joy in the Lord as you would not have rejoiced in him if you had been idle at home.

At any rate, when you do not rejoice, say to yourself, "Come heart, this will not do. Why art thou cast down, O my soul?" I have heard of a mother that whenever her children began to cry, and grow fretty, she said, "They must have medicine." She was sure that they were not well. Whenever you begin to fret and worry, say to yourself, "I must take heavenly medicine, for I am not right. The leaves of the Scriptures are for my healing: I will use them for my soul's good. If my heart were right I should rejoice in the Lord, and as I am not rejoicing, I must resort to the great Physician.

Brethren, we must rejoice. Why should we not rejoice, since all things are ours? Heaven is ours in the future, and earth is ours in the present. With the past and all its sin blotted out, the future and all its wants provided for by the bounty of an unchanging God, wherefore should we be disquieted? If we are not glad, the stars may rebuke us as they twinkle amid the darkness: the sun may rebuke us for refusing to shine in the light of God. Come, brethren, let us obey the Word that says, "*Rejoice evermore.*"

Lastly, somebody will say, "But why should we rejoice? What are THE REASONS FOR THIS REJOICING?" We ought not to want arguments to persuade us to be happy. The worlding says that "he counts it one of the wisest things to drive dull care away." The child of God may count it the wisest thing to cast his care

upon his God. You do not want an argument for rejoicing; but if you did, it is found in the command of your Lord, who says to you, "Rejoice evermore."

Rejoicing wards off temptation. The Christian may be tempted; but little impression is made upon him by the pleasurable bait if he is happy in the Lord. There is a passage in Paul—I forget just now where it is—where he speaks of putting on the armor of light. It is fine poetry as well as solid fact that we wear the armor of light; and part of the meaning is, that we are so surrounded with seraphic joy that nothing can tempt us. The joy which we wear is far superior to any which the evil one can offer us; and so his temptation has lost its power. What can the devil offer a joyous Christian? Why, if he were to say to him, "I will give thee all the kingdoms of the world and the glory thereof, if thou wilt fall down and worship me, the believer would reply to him, "Fiend, I have more than that. I have perfect contentment; I have absolute delight in God. My soul swims in a deep sea of bliss as I think of God." The devil will speedily quit such a man as that; for the joy of the Lord is an armor through which he cannot send the dagger of his temptation.

This joy of the Lord will shut out worldly mirth from the heart. The rejoicing Christian is not the kind of man that wants to spend his evenings in a theatre. "Pooh!" he says, "what can I do there?" You say to the man who has once eaten bread, "I will take you to such a grand feast. I will show you a company of swine all feeding upon husks. Look upon them, see how they enjoy themselves! You shall have as much as you like, and be as happy as they are." He says, "But you do not know me: you do not understand me. I have none of the qualities that link me

with swine. I cannot enjoy the things which they enjoy." He that is once happy in God pours contempt upon the sublimest happiness that a worldling can know. It is altogether out of his line. He does not know their mirth, even as they do not know his rejoicing. I suppose that the fish of the sea have joys suitable to their natures. I do not envy them; I am not inclined to dive into their element. It is so with the children of God; they are not inclined to go after wordly things when they are happy in the Lord. But your miserable professors who simply go to a place of worship because they ought to go, and who are very good because they dare not be anything else, they have no joy in the Lord. They go to the devil for their joy: they openly confess that they must have a bit of pleasure sometimes, and therefore they go to questionable amusements. No wonder that they are found in Satan's courts, looking up to him for delights, since they find no rejoicing in the ways of the Lord.

He that rejoices in the Lord always will be *a great encouragement to his fellow-Christians*. He comes into the room: you like the very look of his face. It is a half-holiday to look at him; and as soon as ever he speaks he drops a sweet word of encouragement for the weak and afflicted. We have some brethren round about us whose faces always refresh me before preaching. Their words are cheering and strengthening. Those who rejoice in the Lord evermore cannot help perfuming the room where they are with the aroma of their joy. Others catch the blessed contagion of their contentment, and become happy too.

This is the kind of thing that attracts sinners. They used in the old times to catch pigeons and send them out with sweet unguents on their wings: other pigeons

followed them into the dovecote for the sake of their perfume, and so were captured. I would that every one of us had the heavenly anointing on our wings, the divine perfumes of peace, and joy, and rest; for then others would be fascinated to Jesus, allured to heaven.

God grant that it may be so, for Jesus' sake!
Amen.

VIII.

ZEALOUS, BUT WRONG.

“Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.”—ROMANS x. 1, 2, 3.

WE ought to have an intense longing for the salvation of all sorts of men, and especially for those, if there are any, that treat us badly. We should never wish them ill, not for a moment: but in proportion to their malice should be our intense desire for their good. Israel had persecuted Paul everywhere with the bitterest imaginable hate. When he addressed them in their synagogues, they rushed upon him in their fury. When he let them alone, and preached quietly to the Gentiles, they made a mob, dragged him before the magistrates, charged him with causing a tumult, and either stoned him, or beat him with rods. He was “an Israelite indeed,” but his people regarded him as a turncoat indeed, because he had become a Christian. Mad as they were against all Christians, they had a special spite and fury against the apostate Pharisee. Paul’s only reply to all their infuriated malice is this gentle assertion: “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved.”

Brethren, let us pray for men that they may be sav-

ed. Simple as the statement is, I feel sure that we shall see more conversions when more people pray for conversions. If, as we went about the street, we made a rule that, whenever we heard a man swear, we would pray that he might be saved, might we not hope to see a great many more saved? If, whenever we saw a case of special sin, or read of it in the newspaper, we were to make it a habit always to offer our heart's desire and prayer for such offenders that they might be saved, I cannot tell what countless blessings would come from God's right hand.

I would bring before you one peculiar class of persons whose conversion some of us should very earnestly pray for. They are the kind of people who are here described by the apostle: Israelities, religious people, intensely religious in their way, although that way is not the way of truth. They have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. They are righteous people, *self*-righteous people, people that have done no ill, but, on the contrary, have labored to do a great deal of good. They are running, and running well, but they are not running in the right road. They are laboring, and laboring hard, but they are not laboring in the right style; and so they will miss their reward. Many of these people are around us, and very admirable people they are in many ways; but their condition causes us the utmost anxiety. There are a few such persons in this present congregation; and though they are not so numerous among us as in many other quarters, yet they have a peculiar place in our affectionate regard. We esteem them so highly that we should be shocked and grieved that one single person of their character should perish. I say most solemnly, "My heart's desire and prayer for

such is, that they might be saved; for I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge."

Bear with me at this time while I talk about these people. If *you* do not belong to this order of minds yourselves, I am glad of it. Pray for them if you yourselves are saved. If you know any such, keep on mentioning them to God in prayer, while I am preaching. Use the next half-hour as a time of quiet pleading with God about individuals of whom you will be reminded while I am talking. Say, "Lord, bless her," or "Lord, bless him." If you are not one of those at whom I shall be specially aiming, then help me with your prayers that this sermon may be clothed with power by the Holy Ghost.

I. And first, WHY ARE WE SPECIALLY CONCERNED FOR THESE PEOPLE? The answer is, "Because *they are so zealous.*" They have a zeal of God. I feel right glad to meet with a zealous man nowadays, for zeal for God has become a rare quality in the land. You see plenty of zeal where politics are concerned. Fashion, and art, and society, and literature, each one evokes zeal of a certain kind: but we are not overdone with those who are zealous in the matter of religion. We seem to be pretty nearly gone to sleep as to the essentials of creed and worship. Who is zealous? Who burns with holy ardor? Who is consumed with sacred enthusiasm? If anybody comes to be a little zealous above others, he is straightway condemned. The man of fervent spirit is laughed at as "a hot gospeller": he is called fanatical, and great efforts are made to put him down. I fear that both the wise and the foolish virgins are going to sleep at this present time. There is a dulness in the religious world, as if we had passed

into a dull, thick, autumn fog. We want a great and general revival. Meanwhile, when we do meet with people who are zealous, we take an interest in them. Zealous at church, zealous in their ceremonies, zealous in their belief of what they believe—however mistaken their zeal may be, there is something interesting about it. We like to associate with people who have hearts—not dry leather bottles, out of which all the juice has gone; but those who have heart, and soul, and life, and fire, and go. I love to meet with those who believe in something, and who work under the pressure of their belief, and give their strength to the carrying out of what they believe to be the will of God. It does seem a very great pity that any zeal should be wasted, and that any one full of zeal should yet miss his way. We fear that there are some who will do so. If you want to go to York you may ride very fast south, but you will not get to York with all your speed. Unless you turn your rein towards the north, you may ride a thousand horses to death, and never see the gates of the old city. It is of no use to be zealous if you are zealous in a wrong cause; but when we meet with any who are such, I say that they become peculiarly the object of a Christian's prayers. Pray for the zealous with all your hearts, for it is such a pity that one of them should go astray.

Again, they should be specially the subject of our prayers, because *they may go so very wrong, and may do so much mischief to others.* Those who have no life nor energy may easily ruin themselves, but they are not likely to harm others; whereas a mistaken zealot is like a madman with a firebrand in his hand. Persons who are zealous, and are under a mistake, may do such a deal of mischief! What did those Scribes and Phari-

sees in Christ's day? They were very zealous, and under the pressure of their zeal they crucified the Lord of glory. What did Saul do in his time? He was very zealous, and under the influence of his zeal he dragged men and women to prison, and compelled them to blaspheme; and when they were put to death he gave his voice against them. I do not doubt that many who burned the martyrs were quite as sincere in their faith as those whom they burned. In fact, it must have taken an awful amount of sincerity in the case of some to have been able to believe that the cruelties which they practised were really pleasing to God. We cannot doubt that they had such sincerity. Did not our Lord himself say, "Yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service"? Documents, written by men who stained their hands with the blood of Protestants, prove that some of them had a right heart towards God. In their mistaken zeal for God, and truth, and church unity, they believed that they were crushing out a very deadly error, and that the persons whom they sent to prison and to death were criminals that ought to be exterminated, because they were destroyers of the souls of men.

Take heed that none of you fall into a persecuting spirit through your zeal for the gospel. A good woman may be intensely zealous, and for that reason she may say, "I will not have a servant in my house who does not go to my place of worship." I have known landlords, wonderfully zealous for the faith, who have therefore turned every Dissenter out of their cottages, and have refused to let one of their farms to a Nonconformist. I do not wonder at their conduct; if they are zealous, and at the same time blind, they

will naturally take to exterminating the children of God. Of course, in their zeal they feel as if they must root out error and schism. They will not have Nonconformity near them, and so they get to work, and in their zeal they hack right and left. They say strong things and bitter things, and then proceed to do cruel things—very cruel things—verily believing that, in all that they do, they are doing God service, not thinking that they are violating the crown rights of God, who alone is Lord of the consciences of men. They would not oppose the will of God if they knew it; and yet they are doing so. They would not willingly grieve the hearts of those whom God loves, and yet they do so when they are browbeating the humble cottager for his faith. They look upon the poor people who differ a little from them as being atrociously wrong, and they consider it to be their duty to set their faces against them, and so, under the influence of the zeal that moves them, which, in itself, is a good thing, they are led to do that which is sinful and unjust. Hence the apostle, after he had felt the weight of the stones from the hands of the Jews, prayed that they might be saved; for if they were not saved, their zeal for God would continue to make murderers of them.

Another reason why we long to see the zealous converted is this—because *they would be so useful*. The man that is desperately earnest in a wrong way, if you can but show him his wrong, and teach him what is right, will be just as earnest in the right way. Oh, what splendid Christians some would make who are now such devotees of superstition! Despite their superstition, I look upon many High Churchmen with admiration. Up in the morning early, or at night late,

ready to practise all kinds of mortifications, to give their very bodies to be burned, and all their substance in alms, ready to offer prayers without number, and to be obedient to rites without end—what more could external religion demand of mortal men? Oh, if we could get these to sit at Jesus' feet, and leave the phylacteries and the broad-bordered garments, and worship God in spirit, and have no confidence in the flesh, what grand people they would make!

See what Paul himself was, when, counting all he had valued so dear to be but dung, he quitted it, and began to preach salvation by grace alone. While he flew over the world like a lightning flash, and preached the gospel as with a peal of thunder, he loved, he lived, he died for the Nazarene, whom once in his zeal he had counted to be an impostor. Brethren, pray with all your might for zealous but mistaken persons, who have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.

Once more, we are bound to make these people the subject of specially earnest prayer because *it is so difficult to convert them*. It requires the power of God to convert anybody really; but there seems to be a double manifestation of power in the conversion of a downright bigot when his bigotry is associated with dense ignorance and gross error. "Oh," says he, "I do that which is right. I am strict in my religion. My righteousness will save me." You cannot get him out of that. It is easier to get a sinner out of his sin than a self-righteous man out of his self-righteousness. Conceit of our own righteousness sticks to us as the skin to the flesh. Sooner may the leopard lose his spots than the proud man his self-righteousness. Oh, that righteousness of ours! We are so fond of it. Our pride hugs it. We do so like to think that we are

good, that we are upright, that we are true, that we are right in the sight of God by nature; and though we be beaten out of it with many stripes, yet our tendency is always to return to it. Self-righteousness is bound up in the heart of man as folly in the heart of a child. Though thou bray a fool in a mortar among wheat with a pestle, yet will not his self-righteous folly depart from him. He will still stick to it that, after all, he is a good fellow, and deserves to be saved. We must, therefore, in a very special manner, pray for such, seeing that self-righteousness is a deep ditch, and it is hard to draw him out who has once fallen into it. Prejudice, of all other opponents, is one of the worst to overcome. The door is locked. You may knock as long as you like; but the man will not open it. He cannot. It is locked, and he has thrown away the key. You may tell him, "You are wrong, good friend": but he is so comfortably assured that he is right, that all your telling will only make him the more angry at you for attempting to disturb his peace. O God! who but thou canst draw a man out of this miry clay of self-righteousness? Therefore do we cry to thee, of thy great grace to do it. For these and many other reasons those who have a zeal for God but not according to knowledge, must have a chief place in our importunate prayers.

II. And secondly, WHAT IS IT THAT THESE PEOPLE ARE ACCORDING TO OUR TEXT? These people will not like the text, nor yet like me for honestly explaining it. According to our text, it is very clear that these good people are *ignorant*. "For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, go about to establish their own righteousness." Ah! you may be brought up under the shadow of a church; you may sit all your

life in a meeting-house: you may hear the gospel till you know every term and phrase by heart, and yet you may be ignorant of the righteousness of God. This is not a very complimentary statement, but as it is made upon inspiration, it behoves us to give earnest heed thereto.

Listen! There are many who are quite ignorant as to the natural righteousness of God's character. They do not know how intensely he hates sin, how his anger burns against injustice and untruth. They have never conceived an idea of how pure he is, how infinitely holy. They have never been in sympathy with the angels' adoration so as to know what is meant by the celestial chant, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth." "Thou thinkest," says God, "that I am altogether such a one as thyself—that if thou art pleased with thy righteousness, I must be pleased with it too; and if thy poor pride and stupefied conscience be satisfied, therefore thy God must be satisfied also." Those who are satisfied with their own holiness are ignorant of God's attribute of righteousness.

Again, they are ignorant of the righteousness of the law. Indeed, there is awful ignorance about that. You may hear the ten commandments read every Sabbath-day, and I think that it is a good thing to have them read, and a good thing to have them posted up where they can be read, but you will not know anything about them by merely reading them. There is a depth of meaning in those commandments, of which self-righteous persons are ignorant. For instance, when they read, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," does it strike most men's minds that even a lascivious look breaks that commandment? Do they reflect that not only acts of fornication and un-

cleanness, but indecent words, thoughts, and looks are forbidden by that command? A man reads, "Thou shalt not kill," and he thinks to himself, "I never committed a murder. I can shake hands with that commandment, and sing a merry song under the gallows-tree." But Christ says, "He that is angry with his brother without a cause, is a murderer"; and ill-will is murder at bottom. Murder is but hate ripened into deed; and therefore the least degree of hate is a violation of the command, "Thou shalt not kill." Who among us has ever measured the full compass of the great law of God? Let me stretch out the line before you for a moment. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself." Who among us has ever done that? The man who says, "I have kept the law" is simply ignorant of the righteousness which the law of God sets before us as the divine requirement. Could we behold the law in all its full-orbed majesty, we should as soon expect to hold the sun in the hollow of our right hand as to fulfil the law in all its length and breadth.

Further than this, dear friends, a man that is self-righteous, and hopes to get to heaven by his works and his religion, is ignorant of God's righteous requirements with regard to his own heart. God requires not only that thou shouldst do that which is right, but that thou shouldst think that which is right, that thou shouldst love that which is right, ay, and that thou shouldst be that which is right. He desires truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part he would have us to know wisdom. If I could govern my tongue entirely, yet might I be guilty before God, even

with that tongue; for there is such a thing as idle silence as well as idle speech. If it were possible to keep the hands right in all things, yet the heart might all the while be willing and anxious to move the hands amiss, and after all it is the way of the heart which is the true gauge of the man's life. Unless thou be clean through and through in thy very inwards, in the core and centre of thy being, thou hast not reached to the righteous requirements of God. What sayest thou to this? Are not many grossly ignorant of this?

And then, again, all persons who are self-righteous must surely be ignorant of God's righteousness in another sense, namely, they are ignorant that God has prepared a better righteousness for us. The Lord God has prepared for man a perfect and divine righteousness, by which he justifieth the ungodly. He has sent his own Son into the world, pure in heart and pure in life, to work out that righteousness. That Son of his has kept the law in every point, and what is more, he has honored the law by his death, whereby he vindicated its tarnished honor, and gave glory to the Law-giver. Now God says, "Sinner, I can make thee righteous through Christ—righteous by imputation. I will impute to thee what Jesus did for thee. I will accept thee on account of what he is, and what he did. He shall be thy righteousness. He shall be made of God unto thee thy righteousness." Now surely, if you say, "No, but I will have a righteousness of my own"; why, man, you must be ignorant of God's righteousness. Would God have taken the trouble to make another righteousness if thou couldst have made one of thine own? Is not Calvary, with all its griefs, a superfluity of naughtiness if men could be saved without

it! The death of Christ upon the tree was an extravagance—a needless extravagance, if men can be saved without it; and if any man can be saved without Christ, saved by his own works, and saved by the principle of the law, then for him is Christ dead in vain. There was no need, in the first place, that Christ should have died for such a man, and to such a man Christ has died for nothing. If thou be righteous, thou hast nothing to do with Christ, for he is a Saviour of sinners. If thou hast a righteousness of thine own, thou art a rival to Christ. Thou art holding up thy twopenny garment of rags, and saying, “This is as good as the divine robe of Christ’s righteousness.” Man, thou art stitching together thy poor fig leaves, and thou art saying, “This is garment enough for me. I want not to wear the livery of God, the garment of Christ.” But those leaves will wither when the sun goes down, and leave thee naked to thy shame. Thou art in opposition to Christ, thou art an Antichrist, and thy sin in setting up such a righteousness is, perhaps, greater than if thou hadst lived in open sin. Thou art, at any rate, casting as much dishonor upon Christ, and doing as much displeasure to God by this vain-glorious attempt to set up thine own righteousness, as if thou hadst gone about, like Pharaoh, to ask, “Who is the Lord that I should obey his voice?” It is only another form of the same pride. In the Egyptian king it takes one shape, and in thee it takes another. Wherefore, beware!

Brothers and sisters, are you praying for these zealous but ignorant and vain-glorious people? Go on with your prayer. Now in silence cry, “Lord, of thy great mercy, be pleased to deliver them from their headstrong zeal! Give them light, that they may quit

their ignorance, and be no longer enemies to the cross and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ!"

III. That brings me to my third point, which is this: I have shown you why they should be prayed for. I have shown you that they are ignorant. Now I am going to show you WHAT THEY DO. According to the text they are going about to establish their own righteousness. I do not know whether I can give you the idea which this language suggests to my mind, but it is this: here is a kind of stuffed image, or, if you like, a statue, and they have set it up, and they want it to stand, but it is so badly constructed that it tumbles down. So they set it up again, and over it goes; in other words, they use all manner of plots and schemes to set up their righteousness upon its legs, but it repeatedly topples over. Another figure which may illustrate the expression is this: they have bad foundations for a house, and bad materials, and bad mortar, and they themselves are by no means good workmen. They have built up quite a height of wall to make a shelter for themselves, but it tumbles down. Never mind; they are very industrious, and so they set to work to put it up again. They are perseveringly determined, somehow or other, to build up a righteousness of their own. That is the meaning of this text. They go about to set up, to establish—to make to stand—their own righteousness, and it is such a crazy thing that it falls down of its own weight, and whenever it tumbles down they set it up again. They go about to do it; that is, they invent all sorts of ways; they go to the ends of the earth to find another bit of stone that will just wedge in and help to settle the corner-stone. All their industry is spent in trying to set up this thing, which is not worth a button when

it is set up. Alas, that folly should be so desperately entrenched in the heart of man that he will spend his whole life in a persevering attempt to insult his Maker by preparing a righteousness of his own, when his Maker has already wrought out, and brought in a righteousness perfect in every respect!

While I am preaching about this I am thinking of myself, and smiling and yet mourning to think how, in the days of my ignorance, I myself tried this ridiculous pastime. The pictures which I shall paint will be drawn from my own personal experience. At first the man says, "I shall be saved, for I have kept the law. What lack I yet?" Now a very small hole will let enough light into the man's heart to force him to see that this pretence will not answer. No one of us has kept the law. What saith the Scripture? "They are all gone out of the way. They are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no not one." You have only to read the law over by the light of conscience, and you must say to yourself, "I see that I cannot be saved by the perfect keeping of the law, since I have broken that law already. When driven from this foolish hope, the man readily sets up another. If he cannot work, then a man tries to feel—and I know I tried to feel. Or else he cries, "I must join a bit of religion to my pure morals. I do not quite understand how the combination is to be made; but we have to maintain a reputation for righteousness, and we must do it by hook or by crook. It is true that I have not kept the law. Well, then, I will pray every morning and pray every night very regularly, and take a good long time over it, too, when I do not go to sleep, or when I do not wake up too late! And I will read so much of the Bible every

day: a grand thing that! And if I can get through the Bible in a certain time, that will score one, will it not? Then I shall attend regularly a place of worship: and then, I think—well, I must be baptized, perhaps, or at any rate confirmed, or I must go to the sacrament; and when I have done all this, do you not think it will come pretty square?" If a man's conscience is awake, it will not come square: or, to go back to the old figure, the image will not stand upright: it will tumble over. After appearing to stand firm for a while, our poor wretched righteousness grows top-heavy again, and over it goes. The man says, "No, I do not feel righteous after all! There is something amiss."

Conscience begins to call out, "It will not do." Peradventure, the man is taken ill. He thinks that he is going to die, and he says, "Alas, I could not die with so poor a hope as this! This boat would never carry me across the river Jordan. I can see that it leaks very terribly. There are a hundred points in which my hope utterly fails me. What shall I do?" Well, then, he must keep his wretched pretence afloat somehow; and so he cries, "At length I must go in for something thunderingly good. I will give a lot of money away." If he is a rich man, he says, "I will endow an almshouse. You see I need not give the money till I die. That will do very well. I had better keep it while I am alive, and then leave it when I cannot keep it. Won't it be a splendid thing? And if I put a painted window in a church, surely that will go a long way; or I will give a lump sum to an hospital." To build a bridge, or mend the common roads, used to be the way in which a man who wanted to bid high for heaven made his offers in olden

times; or else the monks and friars promised to sing him into glory for the small consideration of ten thousand a year. And so men go into that line, and seek salvation by purchase. And they hear about saints who fast. Well, then, they say, "Oh, I shall fast!" Then they say, "I have not prayed long enough, I must pray twice as long."

According to the church to which he belongs, the zealous person becomes a determined partizan of his sect. Remember how Mr. Bunyan says that, when he was a godless man, he could have kissed the earth on which the clergy walked, and he thought that every nail in the church door was sacred. Among dissenters, the man who is trying to save himself usually thinks that every practice of the little community with which he is united is infallibly correct. He has no real love to Christ, and has no trust in Christ's righteousness: but how he will work at his favorite self-salvation! And you will have to work at it, sirs, if you are going to heaven by your works! To work your fingers to the bones is nothing. You might as well try to climb to the stars on a treadmill as to get to heaven by your good works; and, certainly, you might more easily sail from Liverpool to America on a sere leaf than ever get to heaven by works and doings of your own. There is more wanted than will ever come of yourself. You want a Saviour. You must be born again from above. You want a salvation that shall be a gift of infinite charity, a benison of the boundless mercy of the eternal God; and nothing else will save you.

But, oh, men will go about to set up their own righteousness; and I will tell you what some of them will do to-night! "Ah!" they will say, "quite right,

Mr. Spurgeon. Quite right. I cannot bear that work-mongering and self-justification; but I hope that I shall be saved because I feel so deeply my sinnership, and I groan so heavily under a sense of guilt." You trust to that, do you? It is only another form of trusting to your own works. I must rout you out of your feelings, as well as out of your works. You may just as well trust in the one thing that comes of you, as in the other thing that comes of you. Your salvation lies absolutely outside of yourself, in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, and not in what you do, but in what he is. If you add to that foundation stick or stone of your own—thought, feeling, or work of your own—by way of trusting in it, you have spoiled the salvation of Christ. It shall never be "Christ and Company." Hence be sure that if Jesus is to save you must let him do it, and you yourself must stand out of the way. "What! am I not to work?" O yes! Work as hard as ever you like if he has saved you; but as to the salvation itself, that is with him. "But we are to work out our own salvation." Certainly you are, after he has worked it in you to will and to do of his own good pleasure. But you cannot work out of yourself what is not in yourself; and you cannot put it into yourself, the Lord Jesus must put it there for you, and then you must with diligence work it out in your life and conversation. The inner and spiritual work is all his doing, from first to last.

I know that you do not like this doctrine, sir. You are sitting very uneasily, and looking towards the door; I thought I saw you seize your stick just now. Have patience a few minutes longer. Suppose that you were to get to heaven in your way, what would happen? I am afraid that sacred place would become

more than a little mixed. Whenever I get to heaven, I will sing to the praise of the glory of his grace to whom I shall owe it all. When you get there, you cannot sing with me. You must needs have a new tune. You will throw up your cap, and say, "I have managed it after all!" This will lead to a very speedy contest and quarrel. You will glorify yourself, and depend upon it, sinners saved by grace will glorify Christ. Our jealousy for his glory will not suffer us to tolerate you in the realms of the blest. Our Lord is not going to have any discord in heaven; you shall all sing his praises there, or never sing at all. There will be no divided praise; but the strain shall be set to the tune of *Salvation all of grace*. "Salvation to our God that sits upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever."

IV. Lastly, dear people of God, are you praying about these zealous, mistaken people all this while? Let me entreat you to renew your supplications. Shall we stop a minute while you do so? Remember that you also were once in the dark, and that you foolishly hoped to be saved in the same proud and selfish manner which has such charms for them. Pray about them that the Lord will fetch them out of their self-righteousness—"O Lord, of thine infinite mercy, bring to thyself and to thy dear Son, those earnest persons who have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge! O thou, who doest great marvels, enlighten the darkness of those who are prejudiced against the day!"

The fourth thing is, WHAT THEY WILL NOT DO. "Going about to establish their own righteousness, they have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God."

“They have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.” Why, there are some that have not submitted even to *hear it!* Possibly, I address to-night one who never came here before, and has always said, “No, I should not think of going to such a place.” You are only one of a numerous band of people of that character. Our law does not judge any man before it hears him, but these people both judge and condemn the gospel without giving it an hour’s attention. If you speak to them about it, they are wrapped up in an idea of their own righteous perfectness, and they really cannot endure to hear themselves talked to as if they were common sinners. Are they not good enough of themselves? What can you tell them better than they know already? They do not want to hear the gospel. I think that I would recommend them, at any rate, to hear what it is, because the next time they speak against it, they will speak with more knowledge. It is always a pity not to know even that which we most despise. Even contempt should have a rational foundation. It will not hurt you, friend, to know. And yet there is such prejudice in the mind of some that they refuse to acquaint themselves with the verities which God has revealed. “Sinners saved by grace!” they say: “Salvation by faith! It is all very well for the commonality; but it does not do for ladies and gentlemen like us. We were always so good.” Very well, then; if that really is the case, you know there is a heaven for the commonalty, and it is highly probable that you ladies and gentlemen are too good to go there. Where will you go? There is but one way to heaven, and that way is closed against the proud; and if you choose to be so proud, you will close

it against yourself, and we cannot help you. But we will pray—pray God that prejudice may yield, and that to-night, and at other times, those who have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge, may, at least, be willing to hear what the gospel is. How many have been brought to Christ in the old times by reading Martin Luther upon the Galatians! That is a book in a rough enough style. What sledge-hammer words Martin uses! Only the other day I met a man who came to me like one of the old Puritans, and he said to me that he had traversed the line of the two covenants. He began to converse with me in that antique majestic style which comes of Puritanic theology. I thought—Bless the man! He has risen from the dead. He is one of Oliver Cromwell's gray Ironsides. He will be able to tell me of Naseby and Marston Moor. So I said to him, "Covenant and law, where did you pick that up, friend?" "Not at any church or chapel," said he. "There are none round about where I live who know anything at all about it. They are all in the dark together—dumb dogs that cannot bark." "How did you stumble on the true light?" I asked. The man replied, "In the good providence of God, I met with Master Martin Luther on the Galatians. I bought it for sixpence out of a box in front of a bookseller's shop." Oh, it was a good find for that man! Six pennyworth of salvation, according to the judgment of men, but infinite riches according to the judgment of God. He had indeed found a jewel when he learned the truth of salvation by grace through faith. I recommend persons, whether they will read Martin Luther or any other author, to be especially careful to read the Epistle to the Galatians itself. Paul hammers there against all hope of salvation by the law,

and puts salvation on the basis of grace, and grace alone, through faith which is in Christ Jesus. Still there are many who will not incline their ear, and come unto Christ: they will not even hear that their souls may live. Do not they deserve to die who are too proud to hearken to the way of life?

And then there are others who, when they hear it, will not admit that they need it. "What, sir! Must I go down on my knees? Must I confess that I am a sinner, a real sinner? Must I come before God as if I had been a criminal? Must I stand in the dock, and plead guilty?" Yes, you must, or else you will never be saved. "They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick." Off with that helmet of obstinacy! Down with the plumes of pride! Thou must come to God on thy bended knees, with a rope about thy neck, as one who is only fit to die, and to be cast into hell, for he will never save thee on any other terms. He must extend to thee the sceptre of his absolutely sovereign grace, and save thee as an undeserving, hell-deserving sinner, or else thou canst never be saved at all. What sayest thou to this? Dost thou reply, "I will never submit to such a humiliation"? God will never alter his terms to please you. Some will not submit to accept salvation. It is freely offered, without money and without price, but men would like to pay for it at least a something, and they turn upon their heel. They will not have it as a free gift.

Again, there are others who will not submit to the spirit of it—to the influence of it, for you must know that the spirit of free grace is this—if God saves me for nothing, then I belong to him for ever and ever. If he forgives me every sin, simply because I believe

in Jesus, then I will hate every sin, and flee from it. If he grants me forgiveness on no ground but that of his own absolute mercy and good pleasure, as he has put it, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion;" then I will love him with all my heart, and soul, and strength, till time shall be no more. Now, for the love I bear him, I will lead a holy life. I will serve him with every power of my being. The virtue I aimed at before, in my own strength, I will now ask for from his Holy Spirit. The goodness that I thought I had but never had, I will seek to have as a gift of his grace wrought in me: and I, because of his great goodness to me, will live to him, and will not henceforth serve myself or serve sin, but will serve him who has bought me with his precious blood. Many will not submit to that; yet they can never be saved from sin unless they yield themselves as the blood-bought servants of Christ. Christ comes to save his people from their sins, and from their sins he will save them: they shall no longer be in bondage to the powers of evil. The Lord Jesus accomplishes this salvation by freely forgiving them, and then moving their hearts to such a love of him that they become in love with everything that is pure and holy, and are filled with hatred of everything that is unjust, and wrong, and wicked, and their life becomes totally changed. What the principle of law talked about doing, but never did, the principle of grace actually does. It puts a new mainspring into the man: and when the works within are right, then the hands without soon move according to right rules. I most earnestly pray that many of you may submit to the righteousness of Christ. Yield yourselves up; trust in Christ; believe in him

who died for sinners; take him to be your Saviour to-night. Do not go to sleep till this is done, lest you wake up in the bottomless pit.

With my whole soul I offer the prayer of my text this night; and do you also, dear friends, keep on praying. I ask all of you Christian people to insert a special petition into all your prayers, and to keep it there—"O Lord, save by thy grace those who have a zeal for thee, which is not according to knowledge! Grant that they may not go about to establish their own righteousness, but may submit themselves unto the righteousness of God!" Amen and Amen.

IX.

WHO FOUND IT OUT?

June 6, 1886.

“And there were four leprous men at the entering in of the gate; and they said one to another, Why sit we here until we die? If we say, We will enter into the city, then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there; and if we sit still here, we die also. Now therefore come, and let us fall unto the host of the Syrians; if they save us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall but die. And they rose up in the twilight, to go unto the camp of the Syrians: and when they were come to the uttermost part of the camp of Syria, behold, there was no man there. For the Lord had made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great host; and they said one to another, Lo, the king of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians, to come upon us. Wherefore they arose and fled in the twilight and left their tents, and their horses, and their asses, even the camp as it was, and fled for their life.”—2 *Kings* vii. 3-7.

THE story of four leprous men inserted in the Book of the Kings of Israel: is it not singular? No; it is not singular for the Bible. If you were to take out of the Scriptures all the stories that have to do with poor, afflicted men and women, what a very small book the Bible would become, especially if together with the stories you removed all the psalms of the sorrowful, all the promises for the distressed, and all the passages which belong to the children of grief! This book, indeed, for the most part is made up of the annals of the poor and despised.

Think for a minute what a space is occupied with the life of the man who was separated from his brethren, sold for a slave, and put in prison in Egypt! What a large part of the Bible is occupied by the writings of one who was a babe exposed on the Nile, and afterwards kept a flock for forty years in the wilderness! We could not part with the account of the man who lost all his property and children in one day and sat among the ashes, covered with sore boils. We could not spare the story of the two widows who came together empty-handed from the land of Moab, one of whom went to glean in the fields of Boaz; nor the history of that woman of a sorrowful spirit, and her little boy, around whom the hope of Israel gathered in the dark days of Eli's feeble rule. Page after page of holy writ is enriched with the experience of that youth who was taken from tending the flock to become the champion of his country, and was afterwards hunted like a partridge upon the mountain by the envious king. We could not give up the history of the prophet of sorrow, nor of the fugitive who was cast into the sea, nor even the minor incidents of the widow of Sarepta, and her barrel of meal, and the prophet's widow whose creditor was about to seize her children for her husband's debts. Nor do lepers fall behind; we have two stories of lepers close together—Naaman the Syrian, and the four in our text at Samaria's gate. They were wisely put forth from Israel, but they were not put forth from Israel's God.

It is clear enough that the poor and the needy are not only observed by our great King; but the pen of the Holy Spirit has been much occupied in recording their affairs. Ye that are poor and needy, ye that are sick and sorrowful, ye whose lives are spent in mourn-

ing, listen to this discourse, and may the Lord comfort your hearts! On a future day, when the great books of history, which, as yet, are only known to the recording angel, shall be read of all men, your story will appear; and maybe it will be as memorable as that of Hannah or Joseph, and God will get as much glory out of what he has done for you as from any of the deeds of his love recorded in the inspired page. Remember that the New Testament runs in the same strain. Under the economy of grace our Lord Jesus Christ is seen living among fishermen and peasants, and calling the poor to be his disciples. "God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen; yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are." It is worth while to be among the poor, the despised, and the sad, to have your record on high, and to magnify the condescension of the Lord. It is in the hope that some disconsolate ones may be cheered that I speak at this time. Oh, that some leprous ones may go forth to-day, and make a grand discovery! I desire to preach, praying in the Holy Ghost that the Holy Ghost may bless the word, and move many to rise out of their despair, and say, "Why sit we here until we die?"

I. First, I call your attention to A GREAT WORK OF GOD WHICH WAS ENTIRELY UNKNOWN. The city of Samaria had been shut up for some time by the Syrian army; famine had fallen upon the people, and driven them to horrible straits. One can hardly bear to read of mothers devouring their own babes through stress of hunger. God sent his servant Elisha to tell them that the next day there should be a superabundance of food in

the gates of Samaria, but the message was received with open ridicule. No sooner was the promise given than the Lord began to carry it out. It is the way with him, to be true to his word. However great the promise, it is as sure as it is great. And so, ere the sun went down, the Lord had caused Israel's enemies to flee away, and had opened magazines of food for hungry Samaria. Without human aid Jehovah had accomplished his promise, and much more.

The siege was raised from around Samaria. Armed men had stood in their places and kept the way, so that none could go in or out; but they are all gone, not one of them is left. The troopers had fled on foot and left their steeds tethered in rows: captains and common soldiers had alike taken to their heels in hot haste, flying helter-skelter, like frightened sheep. No host threatened the city; it sat on its hill in the twilight, lonely and free. Yet in the city of Samaria they thought themselves cooped up, and set their warders on the wall because of fear in the night. Everybody who went to bed that night felt that he was still in that horrible den where grim death seemed actually present in the skeleton forms of the hunger-bitten. They were as free as the harts of the wilderness had they known it: but their ignorance held them in du-rance vile.

The Lord hath also defeated all their enemies. They had run for their lives; they had fled because of a noise in their ears as of horses and of chariots. He that could first get across the Jordan, and interpose that stream between him and his supposed pursuers, was the happiest man. Without aid from Hittite or Ethiopian, the God of Israel had driven the whole host of Syria like chaff before the wind. Israel had not

now this side Jordan a single foe to attack her: and yet she knew not that the Lord's right hand and his holy arm had gotten him the victory. They set guards to protect them from a foe which was no longer present; and the sentinels paced up and down the walls, and spake to each other in the hoarse voice of starving men, guarding the walls, against an imaginary foe. O Samaria, hadst thou known the gift of God, thy silent streets would have rung with shouts of joy: thy children, instead of cowering down in hunger upon wretched pallets, would have kindled torches, and lit up the night as they hastened to feast upon the plenty which their enemies had bequeathed them! God worketh, and man perceiveth it not; therefore is man unhappy, and God is not praised as he should be.

God has provided plenty for them. The wretched Samaritans drew the hunger-belt more closely about them, and each man hoped that he might sleep for many an hour, and forget his bitter pangs; yet within a stone's throw there was more fine flour and barley than they could possibly consume. They were starving in the midst of plenty, pining, when they might have been feasting. They believed not God, and looked not for relief.

Was not that a strange thing? A city besieged, and not besieged; girt with enemies, as they thought, and yet not an enemy left; starving, and yet near to a feast! See, dear friends, what unbelief can do. They had been promised plenty right speedily by God's own prophet; but they did not believe the promise, nor look out for its fulfilment. Had they been upon the watch, they might have seen the unusual movement in the Syrian camp, and noticed the absolute stillness which succeeded it.

I know a sad parallel to this. The Lord Jesus Christ has come into the world, and has put away the sin of his people; and yet many of them are complaining that their sin can never be put away. The Lord Jesus Christ has routed all the enemies of his people, and yet they are afraid of innumerable evils. None is left to harm them, but they do not remember that the Lord reigneth: they are afraid of this, and afraid of that, and yet in one tremendous battle the Champion of the cross has routed all their foes. They are no longer shut up as prisoners; the Lord has brought them liberty; but they are not aware of it by reason of their unbelief. The Word of God has revealed all this very plainly, and the ministers of Christ proclaim it from day to day; but through unbelief they are still sorrowful, desponding and despairing, in bondage and woe. They will not believe, and therefore they cannot be happy. How said is this unbelief which renders even truth itself untrue to us, and darkens our sun at midday! Our unbelief is our worst enemy.

It is said that drowning men catch at straws: would you not have thought that famishing men might have caught at the word of Elisha? I grant you the promise did seem too great to be true: that lord who scoffed at it was not the only one who judged it to be impossible of fulfilment; and yet when men are brought so very low, they are apt to catch at any hope. How hardened was the unbelief which refused Jehovah's word! Out of the whole population of Samaria there was not one who had such faith in Elisha's promise as to drop over the wall from a window, and go out to see whether the Lord was fulfilling his word. It was solemnly promised, it was grievously needed, and yet not a soul believed in it. Another dreary night is

closing in; Samaria is in her pangs; and yet, did she know it, her citizens might dance for joy. I do not know whether I have given you any idea of the scene which rises so vividly before me; but it seems to me to be a very wonderful sight—a multitude in the last stage of emaciation, perishing with hunger, absolutely dropping dead as they tried to pace the streets, and yet food within sight and reach. They believed themselves to be prisoners, yet no birds could be more free; they regarded themselves as surrounded by deadly enemies, yet never was the land more clear of invaders. Even thus we are constantly seeing the Lord's elect and redeemed ones counting themselves rejected, and fearing that they shall perish. I see those for whom Christ has shed his blood still refusing to rest in his finished work, and rejoice in his glorious victory. Still do I see those for whom there is laid up a crown of life that fadeth not away, and who are inheritors of all covenant blessings, wringing their hands in the destitution of unbelief, and pining away in wretched fear where no fear is. Their soul refuseth to be comforted, and yet all comfort is theirs. Alas, the case is common!

II. When you have realized the picture of the city abiding in sorrow though its deliverance had already come, I want, in the second place, to remark upon a VERY SINGULAR BAND OF DISCOVERERS. A choice quaternion at last found out what the Lord had done, proved it for themselves, and made it known to their fellow-townsmen. Is it not remarkable that these discoverers were lepers? These were the first to discover that Jehovah had gotten the victory, and scattered the armies of Syria, and brought help to his people. These poor diseased beings were compelled to live in shan-

ties outside the city gate, and to keep themselves apart from all others. Fed from day to day with food passed over the wall, so long as there was any to pass over, they rotted away in horrible loathsomeness. What a wretched sight! I will not ask you to step into the hut. There are four living skeletons; or what of flesh remains to them is foul with the hideous marks of leprosy. Their bodies are corrupting in life. They move about, poor sick things as they are, more than half dead. They have had no food sent to them of late, and they must not go for relief. No man cares for them; the best thing that could possibly happen to them would be to die, and yet they have a clinging to life. They were outcasts, offcasts; Israel had thrust them without her gates; their own friends and families were obliged to be separated from them. *These were the discoverers of what God had done!* It is a wonderful thing that those who are most conscious of sin, most despised of men, and least likely to be favored, are often those upon whom Jehovah has fixed the eye of his electing love. The chariot of his grace passes by the towers of haughty kings; but it stops at the hovel of poverty, and even at the prison-gate of despair. The Lord looks on the chief of sinners, and says, "Here will I display my grace; here shall the wonders of my love be seen." Lepers are not the only ones whom men cast out, nor are they the only persons whom God full often stoops to bless. Some who feel loathsome, and vile, and self-abhorred, may be before me now, dreaming that it is impossible for God to bless them: yet these are the characters whom he delights to save. Ah, grace! it is thy wont to dwell in most unlikely places! You would have supposed that surely the king would have gone forth to see, or

that yonder great lord who had ridiculed the prophet, might have relented, and gone forth to observe. But no: there are last that shall be first, and the Lord in his providence and grace pitched upon lepers to be the discoverers of his marvellous miracle. Even thus the keenest observers of grace are those who have the deepest sense of sin. I always like to address myself to the most hopeless grade of experience, to those who are most desponding and despairing, for these are the people who will welcome free grace, since they feel their need of it. Talk of charity to the rich, and they will spurn you; talk of it to the destitute, and they will welcome you. Speak of free grace and dying love to self-righteous persons, and they are deaf to you; but those who are guilty, and know it, welcome the promise of free pardon. I have to tell this morning of pure, rich, free, undeserved favor, which God displays to the guiltiest of the guilty. Those who are in their own esteem at the lowest ebb, are ever the first to understand the wonders of grace.

These men could not hope for a welcome from the Syrians, poor objects that they were; they would be hated as Israelites, and abhorred as lepers; yet they went, and in that camp they found all that they wanted, and much more than they expected. Am I not speaking to some who are saying, "For me to go to Christ would be all in vain: I can suppose his blessing my brother, or my friend, but he never will receive one so altogether unworthy as I am"? That was my imagination once. I believed in the salvation of everybody except myself. It seemed to me as if a special plague and a peculiar curse had lighted upon my nature, and withered my heart. It was not so, as I soon proved, when once I went to Jesus. But how

could I expect to be accepted? I, who had sinned against light and knowledge, and spurned the grace of God when it came to me so lovingly! I speak to those of you who feel that you have no right to mercy; you are the very men who may come boldly for it; since it is not of right, but altogether of favor. You that have no claim to the mercy of God, you are the very people to come to him through Jesus Christ; for where there is the least of anything that is good and meritorious, there there is the most room for generous gifts and gracious pardons. Remember, the Lord Jesus did not come to sell salvation; he asks neither money nor price; but he came himself as the gift of God, and his own free gift is eternal life. Joseph Hart says rightly—

“Who rightly would his alms dispose
Must give them to the poor.”

Are you poor? Then the Lord has an alms for you. If you feel that you are the last person that deserves to be received, you shall be received, at once: the deeper your sense of your unworthiness the better. Even if you lament that you have not a proper sense of need, this only proves your deeper poverty, and shows that you are without claim of any kind. You are neither able to plead law nor gospel in your favor, and must cast yourself on sovereign grace. Do so and live. O poor soul! I wish I could take you by the hand, and go myself with you again to my dear Lord, as I went to him at first. I went to him in the most despairing fashion. You have heard the story of the English king who was wroth with the burgesses of Calais, and declared that he would hang six of them. They came to him with ropes about their necks,

submitting to their doom. That is the way in which I came to Jesus. I accepted my punishment, pleaded guilty, and begged for pardon. Put your rope upon your neck; confess that you deserve to die, and come to Jesus. Put no honeyed words into your mouth; turn out that nonsense of self-righteousness from your heart, and cry, "Save, Lord, or I perish!" If thus you plead you shall never perish. You are the kind of man for whom Christ died—the sort of man whom he never did spurn, and never will spurn, while the world standeth.

Another thing to be noticed about these discoverers of the Lord's work is that they were a people who dared not have joined themselves to God's people. They were not allowed inside the city walls: their wretched hospital was without the gate. They were recognized in some sort of a way as belonging to the congregation of Israel, for their place was near the city gates: still Israel would have none of them; they must not enter one of her houses to take a meal. Some of you have been attending the Tabernacle for years, I know, but you dare not join the church; you would not venture to baptism, or to the Lord's Supper, because you feel so unworthy. You hang on to us after a sort: you would not like quite to give up all connection with the people of God; but yet you would not dare to say that you belong to them. In your secret hearts your bitter cry is that of the leper, "Unclean, unclean, unclean!" Before God you cast ashes on your head, and cover your lip, and sometimes wish that you had never been born: but still you cannot leave the gate of the Lord's people, nor cease altogether from their company. These poor creatures Israel would not own, and yet they were the first to find out

what the Lord had done for his people. How often does it happen that those who are rejected of men are accepted of God! Did I hear one ask—"Do you really mean it?" I do mean it. I mean that some of you who deem that you are destined to be lost, and yet cannot give up hearing the gospel, are sure to find out the gospel yet. I hear you say, "The gospel is not for me, and yet I must hear it. I can never give up my Bible, though I only read my own condemnation in its pages." You are the sort of people to whom the word of salvation is sent, and you are the most likely persons to discover what a Christ there is, what a salvation there is, what a deliverance there is in the grace of God. You are the men that shall yet tell to the king's household the victories of eternal love, and assure those dull, cold Israelites inside the wall that after all there is bread enough and to spare, and treasure to be had if they will but come out and have it.

To describe these discoverers yet more fully, they were men who at last were driven to give themselves up. They said, "We will fall unto the Syrians; and if they kill us we shall but die." Blessed is that man who has given himself up, not to the Syrians, but to the Lord! As long as we can do something, we keep on doing that something to our ruin; but when it is all over with us, and we can do no more, then man's extremity is God's opportunity. The man who struggles as he sinks is hard to be rescued; but when the drowning man has gone down twice, and is just going down for the third time—now is the opportunity for the strong swimmer, who comes in and grasps him firmly and swims with him to shore. You that are going down a third time, you lost ones, listen to this: "The Son of man is come to save that which was lost."

“Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.” O you self-righteous people, how can *you* talk about being saved? What saving do you want? You are as full of good works as you can be, and your pride shines on your brows; how can you be saved? They that shall be saved by Jesus are those that are in themselves lost, ruined, and undone. Until you know your ruin, and confess your sin, it is not likely you will ever accept a Saviour. While you feel that you can save yourselves, you will attempt it; but when you can do no more, then you will fall into the arms of your Saviour; and a blessed fall that will be.

These discoverers I would liken to Columbus, four times repeated; for they found out a new world for Samaria. These four lepers went to the Syrian camp, and saw for themselves: lepers as they were, they came, they saw, they conquered. I think I can see them in the dim twilight, stealing along until they come to the first tent, expecting to be challenged by a picket, and wondering that they are not. They heard no sound of human voice. The horses and mules were heard to stamp, and draw their chains up and down, but their riders were gone, and no noise of human foot was heard. “There are no men about,” cried one of them, “nor signs of men. Let us go into this tent.” They stepped in. A supper was ready. He who had spread that table will never taste it again. The hungry men needed no persuasion, but immediately began to carve for themselves. They took possession of the spoils of war left on the field. After they had feasted they said, “To whom does this gold and silver belong? The prey belongs to us, for our enemies have left the treasure behind them.” They took as many of the

valuables as they could carry, then went into another tent: still no living soul was seen. Where lately a host had rioted, not a soldier remained. There was no sound of revelry that night, nor tramp of guard, nor talk around the watch-fire. The lepers tasted more of the forsaken dainties, drained other goblets, and took more gold and silver. "There is more than we shall know what to do with," they said; so they dug a hole, and banked their gains after the Oriental fashion. Who can conceive the delirious joy of those four lepers in the midst of such abundance?

Do you see what these men did? First, they went and saw for themselves, and then they took possession for themselves. The whole four of them did not own a penny before, and now they are rich beyond a miser's dream. They have enjoyed the feast, and they are filled to the full. They are fully qualified to go and tell the starving city of their discovery, because they are clear that they have made no mistake. They have satisfied their own hunger, gratified their own desire, and tasted and handled for themselves, and so they can speak as men who know and are sure.

Dear friends, he knows the grace of God best who, in all his leprosy and defilement, in all his hunger, and faintness, and weariness, has come to Christ, and fed on the bread of heaven, and drank the water of life, and taken the blessings of the covenant, and made himself rich with hidden treasure. Such a man will speak convincingly, because he will bear a personal witness. This man has no doubts upon the vital points, for Christ is his life: he does not argue, but testify; he is not a special pleader, but a witness. The leper, fed and enriched, stands outside the city gate, and calls to the porter, and wakes him up at the dead of night,

for he has news worth telling. The experienced believer speaks with the accent of conviction, and therein imitates his Master, who spake with authority. "Why," says the porter, "I used to speak to you over the city wall; are you the leper to whom I said that there was no more food for you? I have thrown you nothing for a week, and thought you were dead—are you the man?" He answers, "I am: I do not want your wretched rations now; I am filled, and where I have fed there is enough for you all. Come out, and feast yourselves." "I should not know you," says the porter. All four join in saying. "No, you would not know us; we are new men since we have been to the camp. Believe the story, and tell it to all in the city, for it is true. There is enough and to spare, if they will but come out and have it." The Lord made a good choice when he selected these lepers to be discoverers of his great work. He does wisely when he takes those who are saddest, and fills their mouths with laughter, and their tongues with singing, for these will command attention. These poor wretches could not have made up so amazing a story nor feigned such joy: sorrowing castaways could not have invented the story of free grace. It must be true. Oh, that men would believe it!

How much I wish that through my poor words some gleam of hope would fall upon weary and heavy-laden souls to whom this sermon comes! You say, "Where are they!" I do not know. I know that such persons do come under my ministry in extraordinary numbers. I shall know that they are here before next Sunday, for I shall hear from some of them—"I thank God I was there on Sunday morning; it just suited me; I was diseased with sin; my soul was starving and

dying; but I went to Jesus as I was, and I discovered what I never dreamed could be true: He has done for me exceeding abundantly, above all that I asked or even thought."

III. So far we have come by the Lord's help. I now wish to spend a minute or two in noticing how THEY CAME TO MAKE THIS DISCOVERY. These four lepers, how did they come to find out the flight of Syria? First, I suppose, they made the discovery rather than anybody else because the famine was sorest with them. You see they were lepers outside the gate. In good times they received a daily portion from the town; but you may be pretty sure that the townsmen did not deny themselves on their account. If anybody has to go short, it will probably be those who are dependent upon charity. Nobody in the east is excessively eager to feed lepers in times of famine. Probably the Samaritans thought, and even said, "They are best dead: they are no good to anybody; they are suffering; they cannot earn anything, let them die." Besides, when the supplies within the city were exhausted, you could hardly blame the citizens if they sent nothing to the lepers; for those who were themselves without food had nothing to give. Yet the people within the walls could do something or other to palliate their hunger, they could even resort to horrible cannibalism; but these four lepers were cut off from such desperate resources, they had nobody to kill and eat, and they must therefore die. Then it was that they woke up. Truly, necessity is the mother of invention; and the mother of that blessed invention which finds the Lord Jesus Christ and his finished salvation is the awful necessity of a perishing soul. Let but some men feel the burden of sin, and they will never rest till they

come to Jesus. John Bunyan says that he once thought hardly of Christ, but at last he came to such a pitch of misery that he felt he must come to Jesus anyhow; and he says that he verily believed that if the Lord Jesus had stood before him with a drawn sword in his hand, he would have rushed upon the point of his sword rather than stay away from him. I understand that right well. I would to God that some of you were reduced to so great a necessity that you were driven to the only One who can succor you. Oh, that you were utterly bankrupt! Not a kind wish, say you. Yes, it is. Our complete emptiness constrains us to seek the divine fulness. Look at the prodigal son; so long as he had anything left he did not go home to his Father; but when he had spent all his substance, and had become so hungry that he envied the very hogs he fed, then he said, "I will arise, and go to my Father." Spiritual necessity is that which nerves the soul with courage to cast itself upon sovereign grace in Jesus Christ.

These lepers were driven to go to make the discovery because they felt that they could not be any worse than they were. They said, "If we sit here we shall die; and if the Syrians kill us, we shall but die." That feeling has often driven souls to Christ.

"I can but perish if I go;
I am resolved to try;
For if stay away, I know
I must for ever die."

They could but die, and they were sure to die if they sat where they were. Poor soul! are you within reach of my voice? Is your case desperate? Well, then, *try faith*. You cannot be any worse, and you may be better. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. If

he should reject you, you cannot be any worse; but then, he cannot reject you; for he says, "Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out." I would pray for mercy if I were you. Suppose you are not heard: you cannot be the worse for praying. I would cast myself on Jesus if I were you; you could not be the worse for doing so. Every day I say to myself—

"What though my eye of faith be dim,
I'll hold on Jesus, sink or swim."

I cannot be blamed for trusting to one who has saved so many. O my hearer, there is no risk in the matter: you must be infinitely better for coming to the appointed Saviour! Come and try him. Come at this moment.

Again, these people saw that there was no reason why they should not go, for they said one to the other, "Why sit we here until we die?" They could not find a justification for inaction. They could not say, "We sit here because the king commands us to stop where we are." You cannot say, my dear hearer, that you remain ungodly and unbelieving, because the Lord bids you do so. Far from it. He bids you forsake your way and your thoughts, and turn unto him and live. He promises that he will receive you, and therefore he cries, "Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?" The lepers could not say that they sat there because they were chained, or locked in, and so were compelled to starve in their hut. They could move to the Syrian camp, and this was their one liberty. You also are not compelled to be as you are. Is there any reason why you should not pray? Is there any barrier to your trusting the Lord, except it be in your own heart? You are not compelled to remain ungodly,

thoughtless, prayerless, faithless. You are not compelled to be lost; there is no compulsion put upon you to force you away from Jesus and eternal life. Oh, that you would pluck up heart and say, "Why should we sit here until we die?" I hope there is no deadly despair upon you yet; certainly there should not be. These men did not feel that it was certain that they would die if they went to the Syrian camp; they had a little hope, and on that hope they acted, like sensible men. You remember how the people of Nineveh humbled themselves before God with nothing to encourage them, but "Who can tell?" Jonah said, "Forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown;" and they could get no more comfort than the question, "Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?" Oh, poor troubled heart, *who can tell?* There may be mercy for you, and not a little mercy, either. The full, rich, eternal mercy of the Lord may be enjoyed by you before the sun goes down. That head of yours will yet wear the starry crown; about your naked loins there shall yet be girt the fair linen of Christ's righteousness. Do not believe the devil if he says you must die. You need not die. Have confidence and venture now to Christ, and you shall find relief. I speak what I know, and know what I speak.

These lepers went to the camp of the Syrians because they were shut up to that one course—"If we say, we will enter into the city, then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there: and if we sit still here we die also." Only one road was open. I am always glad when I am in that condition. If many courses are open to me I may make a mistake; but when I see only one road I know which way to go. It is a bless-

ed thing to be shut up to faith in Christ—to be compelled to look to grace alone. I spoke to a friend this week who is sore sick, and I said, “You are resting in Christ, my brother.” He replied, “I have nothing else to rest in.” I said, “Your hope is in the atoning sacrifice of Christ,” and he answered, “What other hope could I have?” While we have fifty ways of salvation we shall be lost; but when we see that “other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, even Jesus Christ the righteous,” then we shall build upon it and be safe.

These lepers were not the men to theorize; they were in such a plight that they must come to prompt action. Many ladies and gentlemen treat religion as a science, and therefore they never know its real powers. Many professors and learned doctors speculate upon theology as if it were part of a liberal education, but by no means a practical matter. People who have no sin to wash away, and no great spiritual trouble to bear, play at religion; but those who are ready to perish look on matters in another light. We are not chemists analyzing the bread of life; we are fainting men and women who feed on it with eagerness. Our resolve is—

“I’ll go to Jesus, though my sin
Hath like a mountain rose;
I know his courts, I’ll enter in,
Whatever may oppose.

“Perhaps he will admit my plea;
Perhaps will hear my prayer;
But if I perish, I will pray,
And perish only there.”

These lepers discovered what the Lord had done because they did not give themselves up to dreams and guesses, but came to downright matters of fact. May

God drive every unconverted sinner into a corner, and so compel him to yield to grace! May he bring you to act in earnest; may he drive you by the extreme necessities of your case to seek and to find, to search and to discover!

IV. I ask your patience for a minute while I say, in the fourth place,—MAY NOT SOME SAD HEARTS IMITATE THESE LEPERS, and make the same discovery? “I am afraid to believe in Christ,” says one, “for my sins, my many sins, prevent me.” Look at the lepers, and see how much better the Lord was to them than their fears. It is twilight, and they steal into the camp trembling. One cries, “Softly, there, Simeon! Your heavy tread will bring the guard upon us.” Eleazar gently whispers to the other, “Make no noise. If they sleep, let us not arouse them.” They might tread as heavily as they pleased, and talk as loudly as they wished, for there was no man there. Do you know it? If you believe in the Lord Jesus, your sins, which are many, are all forgiven—there is no sin left to accuse you. You are afraid they will ruin you? They have ceased to be: the depths have covered them; there is not one of them left. “The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” Your sins were numbered on the scape-goat’s head of old. Jesus bore your sins in his own body on the tree. If you come to Christ, confessing and believing, no sin shall destroy you, for it is blotted out.

Perhaps these men feared when they were going into the tent—“A Syrian will meet us at the tent door, and cry, ‘Back, what business have you here? Lepers, begone! Back to your dens and die.’” They entered into tent after tent: nobody forbade them: they had the entry of every pavilion. They were also possess-

ors of all they saw. When I came to Christ, I could not believe that I might take the promises ; but I did, and nobody said me nay. I have gone on appropriating promises ever since,—exceeding great and precious promises: and nobody has said me nay. I find I can make myself most free in Christ's house, and the more free I am, the better he is pleased. His rule is—ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you. The Lord gives us full liberty to come into his secret place, even to his throne of grace. Oh, that some poor heart would come at this moment! Instead of being repulsed, you shall find a hearty welcome, even into the most holy places.

Perhaps the leper felt some little question when he saw a golden cup, or a silver flagon, or a well-fashioned cruet. What have lepers to do with golden cups? But he overcame his scruples. No law could hinder his sharing the leavings of a runaway enemy. Nobody was there to stop him, and the valuables were set before him, and therefore he took what was provided for him. The lepers grew more and more bold, till they carried off as much of the booty as they were able to hide away. I take up my parable, and without scruple invite you to deal thus with salvation. When I came to Jesus, I hardly dared to appropriate a promise: it looked like stealing. I did not, could not believe, that I had a right to any of the good things provided for the Lord's people; but I took gospel-leave, and enjoyed them. I find it written, "No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly," and therefore I feel that nothing is withheld from me. I venture to take what grace has put in my way. I take possession of everything that I can find in Christ. I have never yet found either conscience.

or the Word of God, or the Lord himself upbraid me for appropriating the precious things laid up in the covenant for believers; therefore I grow bolder, and yet more bold. One of these days I, who am the least of all saints, expect to stand amongst the bright ones near the throne, and sing "Hallelujah to God and the Lamb." I do not think that I shall be ashamed to stand there. I am ashamed of myself for ten thousand reasons, but I shall not be ashamed at the Lord's coming.

"Bold shall I stand in that great day."

You poor lepers, you poor lost and ruined ones, come to my Lord Jesus! Believe it, the whole land is before you: the land that floweth with milk and honey is for you. This world is yours, and worlds to come. Christ is yours; yea, God himself is yours. Everything is to be had for nothing. Heaven and all its joys are to be had upon believing. God make you the discoverers this day of his wondrous grace, and to him shall be praise for ever and ever! **Amen.**

X.

THE PERSONAL PENTECOST AND THE GLORIOUS HOPE.

June 13, 1886.

“And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.”—ROMANS V. 5.

PENTECOST is repeated in the heart of every believer. Let me give you a little bit of *historical analogy* to illustrate the text. The Lord's disciples were made to sorrow at his cross. Sore was the tribulation which came upon them as they thought upon his death, and his burial in Joseph's sepulchre. But after a little patience and experience, their hope revived; for their Lord rose from the dead, and they beheld him ascending into heaven. Their hopes were bright concerning their Lord, who had gone into glory, and had left them a promise to come again, and to make them partakers of his victory. After that hope had been begotten in them, they were in due time made partakers of the Holy Spirit, whose divine influence was shed abroad upon them, so that they were filled with his power. Then were they made bold. They were not ashamed of their hope, but proclaimed it by the preaching of Peter and the rest of them. The Holy Spirit had visited them, and therefore they fearlessly proclaimed to the world the Lord Jesus, their hope of glory.

Truly, history repeats itself. The history of our Lord is the foreshadowing of the experience of all his

people; that which happeneth to the First-born befall-eth in measure all the brethren. We have before us in our text an admirable example. First comes our tribulation, our agony, our cross-bearing. Out of our patience and experience there arises in due season a blessed hope: we are quickened by our Lord's resurrection life, and come forth from our sorrow: he raiseth us up from the grave of our woe. Then comes the divine visitation of the Holy Ghost, and we enjoy our Pentecost: "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us." I trust we know what this means, and are now enjoying it. Consequent upon that visitation our hope becomes clear and assured, and we are led to make a full outspoken testimony concerning our hope, and that blessed One who is the substance of it. I hope that many of us have already proved that we are not ashamed, and that others of you will yet do so. Our God has visited us in mercy, and endowed us with the Holy Ghost, who is his choice gift to his children. The Holy Spirit dwelling in us has caused us to know and feel the love of God, and now we cannot but speak and tell forth to others of what the Lord has made known to us. Thus on a small scale have we rehearsed a portion of early church history in our own personal story. You shall find that not only in this case, but in all cases, the life of the believer is in miniature the life of Christ. He who originally said, "Let us make man in our image," still in the new creation follows the model of Christ in the new-making of chosen men.

Now let me give you a little passage of *experimental mystery*. You have it here spread before you in a little map of the inner life:—"Tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience,

hope : and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." This passage can only be fully understood by those people of God who have had it written in capital letters on their own hearts. "Tribulation worketh patience," says the apostle. Naturally it is not so. Tribulation worketh impatience, and impatience misses the fruit of experience and sours into hopelessness. Ask many who have buried a dear child, or have lost their wealth, or have suffered pain of body, and they will tell you that the natural result of affliction is to produce irritation against providence, rebellion against God, questioning unbelief, petulance, and all sorts of evils. But what a wonderful alteration takes place when the heart is renewed by the Holy Spirit! Then, but not till then, tribulation worketh patience. He that is never troubled cannot exercise patience. Angels cannot personally exhibit patience, since they are not capable of suffering. It is necessary to the possession and exercise of patience that we should be tried; and a great degree of patience can only come by a great degree of trial. Ye have heard of the patience of Job: did he learn it among his flocks, or with his camels, or with his children when they were feasting? Nay, verily, he learned it when he sat among the ashes, and scraped himself with a potsherd, and his heart was heavy because of the death of his children. Patience is a pearl which is only found in the deep seas of affliction; and only grace can find it there, bring it to the surface, and adorn the neck of faith therewith.

It comes to pass that this patience worketh in us experience: that is to say, the more we endure, the more we test the faithfulness of God, the more we

prove his love, and the more we perceive his wisdom. He that hath never endured may believe in the sustaining power of grace, but he has never had experience of it. You must put to sea to know the skill of the divine Pilot, and you must be buffeted with tempest before you can know his power over winds and waves. How can we see Jesus in his full power unless there be a storm for him to turn into a calm? Our patience works in us an experimental acquaintance with the truth, the faithfulness, the love, and the power of our God. We bow in patience, and then we rise in happy experience of heavenly support. What better wealth can a man have than to be rich in experience? Experience teaches. This is the real High School for God's children. I scarcely think we learn anything thoroughly without the rod of affliction. Certainly we know best that which has been a matter of personal experience. We need that truth should be burned into us with the hot iron of affliction before we know it effectually: after that no man may trouble us, for our heart bears the brand of the Lord Jesus. Thus patience worketh experience.

It is rather singular that it should then be said, "and experience works hope,"—not singular in the sense of being questionable, for there is no hope so bright as that of the man who knows by experience the faithfulness and love of God. But does it not seem singular that this heavy tribulation, this grievous affliction, this painful chastisement should nevertheless bring forth for us this bright particular light, this morning star of hope, this herald of the everlasting day of glory? Brethren, how wonderfully doth divine alchemy fetch fine gold out of metal which we thought to be worthless! The Lord in his grace

spreads a couch for his own upon the threshing-floor of tribulation, and there, like Boaz, we take our rest. He sets to music the roar of the water-floods of trouble. Out of the foam of the sea of sorrow he causeth to rise the bright spirit of "hope that maketh not ashamed."

This passage from which we have taken our text is a choice extract from the inner life of a spiritual man: it is a fragment of the believer's riddle; let him read it that hath understanding.

Before I plunge into my subject, let me point out to you that this text is none other than the house of God, and the gate of heaven. Behold a temple for the worship of the Divine Trinity in my text. Read the fifth and sixth verses together:—"The love of God (*the Father*) is shed abroad in our hearts by *the Holy Ghost* which is given unto us. For when we were yet without strength, in due time *Christ* died for the ungodly." Behold the blessed Three in One! It needs the Trinity to make a Christian, it needs the Trinity to cheer a Christian, it needs the Trinity to complete a Christian, it need the Trinity to create in a Christian the hope of glory. I always like these passages which bring us so near to the Trinity. Let us pause awhile and adore: "Glory be unto the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end! Amen." It is most sweet to be called upon to offer special worship unto the one God in the Trinity of his divine Persons, and to feel your heart readily inclined thereto, as we do at this hour. By faith we bow with the hosts of the redeemed before the all-glorious throne, and worship him that liveth for ever. How heartily may we do this when we think of the unity of the Sacred Three in our salva-

tion! We have divine love bestowed by the Father, made manifest in the death of the Son, and shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Oh, to feel at this moment communion with the Triune God! Let us bow before the sacred majesty of Jehovah, and then, by the teaching of the Holy Spirit let us enter the temple of our text.

The text runneth thus: "Hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." The apostle had worked up the subject till he came to the hope of glory. When he had reached that height he could not help saying somewhat concerning it. Turning away from his main subject, as is often his custom, he makes a diversion, and gives us a few glowing sentences upon the believer's hope.

Our first head will be *the confidence of our hope*—the hope which maketh not ashamed; secondly, *the reason of this our confidence*, which I hope we are enjoying to-day, for we are confident about our hope that we shall never be disappointed in it, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. Thirdly, we shall have a word or two to say upon *the result of this confidence of hope*, since for this cause we bear testimony to the world, and declare that we are not ashamed of the gospel of Christ

I. First then, consider THE CONFIDENCE OF OUR HOPE. *We are not ashamed of our hope.* Some persons have no hope, or only one of which they might justly be ashamed. Ask many who deny the Scriptures what is their hope for the future. "I shall die like a dog," says one. "When I am dead there's an end of me." If I had such a wretched hope as that I certainly

would not go about the world proclaiming it. I should not think of gathering a large congregation like this, and saying to you, "Brethren, rejoice with me, for we are all to die like cats and dogs." It would never strike me as being a matter to be gloried in. The Agnostic knows nothing, and therefore I suppose he hopes nothing. Here, also, I do not see much to stir enthusiasm. If I had no more hope than that, I should be ashamed. The Romanist's best hope when he dies is, that he may come right in the end, but that meanwhile he will have to undergo the purging fires of purgatory. I do not know much about that place, for I cannot find mention of it in Holy Scripture; but those who know it well, because they invented it, and keep its keys, describe it as a dreary region, to which even great bishops and cardinals must go. I have seen, personally seen, invitations to the faithful to pray for the repose of the soul of a late eminent cardinal; and if such be the lot of the princes of the church, where must ordinary people go? There is no great excellence in this hope. I do not think I should call you all together in order to say to you, "Rejoice with me, for when we die we shall all go to purgatory." You would fail to see the special ground of rejoicing. I do not think I should say much about it: and when anybody questioned me thereon, I should endeavor to evade the point, and declare that it was a deep mystery, which had better be left to the clergy. But we are not ashamed of our hope, we Christian people, who believe that those believers who are absent from the body are present with the Lord. We look for a city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God. We are not ashamed to hope for glory, and immortality, and eternal life.

We are not ashamed of the object of our hope. We do not believe in gross carnal delights as making up our heaven. We do not believe in a Mahometan paradise of sensual delights, or we might very well be ashamed of our hope. Whatever imagery we may use, we intend thereby pure, holy, spiritual, and refined happiness, such as the False Prophet would not have regarded as a sufficient bait for his followers. Our hope is this: that our Lord will come a second time, and all his holy angels with him; then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. We believe that if we fall asleep before that time we shall sleep in Jesus, and shall be blessed with him. "To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise," is not for the thief only, but for all of us who have trusted our souls with the crucified Saviour. At his coming we expect a glorious resurrection. When he shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the trump of the archangel, and the voice of God, then shall our souls be restored to our bodies, and our complete manhood shall live with Christ. We believe, and are sure, that from that day, we shall be for ever with him. He will give us to be partakers of his throne, and of his crown, and of his heaven; and that for ever and ever. The more we talk about the promised bliss, the more we feel that we could not be ashamed of the hope of glory. The ultimate reward of faith, the ultimate reward of a life of righteousness, is such that we joy and rejoice in prospect of it. Our glorious hope retains within it purity and perfection: freedom from all sin, and the possession of every virtue. Our hope is, that we shall be like our perfect Lord, and shall be with Jesus where he is, that we **may behold his glory.** Our hope is fulfilled in that

promise, "Because I live ye shall live also." We shall not merely exist, but *live*, which is another and a higher matter. Our life shall be the life of God in our spirits for ever and ever. We are not ashamed of this hope; but we press forward to the attaining of it.

Furthermore, *we are not ashamed of the ground of our hope.* Our hope rests upon the solemn promises of God, which he hath made to us by his prophets and apostles, and confirmed in the person and work of his dear Son. Inasmuch as Jesus Christ died and rose from the dead, we that are one with him by faith are sure that we shall rise again from the dead, and live with him. The fact of Christ's resurrection, is the assurance of our resurrection, and his entrance into glory is the pledge of our glorification, because we are made one with him by the purpose and grace of God. As we fell in Adam by virtue of our being in him, so we rise and reign with Jesus because we are in him. God is not the God of the dead, but of the living; yet is he the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, and therefore these men are yet alive. Even thus do we believe concerning all who die in the faith that they have not ceased to be, but they all live unto him. Our hope is founded, not upon reasoning, which, possibly, may dimly prove the immortality of the soul and the future reward of the righteous; but upon Revelation, which states it clearly and plainly, and leaves no room for question. If this Book be a lie, our hope must be given up: but inasmuch as we have not followed cunningly devised fables, but have received the testimony of faithful eye-witnesses of our Lord's resurrection and ascension, we believe the holy record, and are not ashamed of our hope. What God hath

promised is sure, and what God hath done fully confirms the same, and therefore we have no fear.

And, brethren, *we are not ashamed of our personal appropriation of this hope.* Somebody may sneeringly say to us, "You expect to be in glory, do you?" Yes, we do, and we are not ashamed to own the soft impeachment; for our confidence is well grounded. Our expectation is not based upon any proud claim of personal deservings, but upon the promise of a faithful God. He hath said, "He that believeth in him hath everlasting life." We do believe in him, and therefore we know that we have eternal life. He has declared in his Word that, "whom he justified, them he also glorified"; and we are justified by faith, therefore we shall be glorified. Our hope is not based on mere feeling, but on the fact that God hath promised everlasting life to them that believe in his Son Jesus. We have heard our Lord pray, "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory." We believe that the Father gave us to Jesus because we have been led to put our trust in him, and faith is the sure sign and token of divine election: therefore being Christ's, we expect to be with him where he is. Reading in the Word of the Lord the word, "that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life," we hold on to that promise, and know that we have everlasting life. This seems to us to be strictly logical argument: unless it be a mistake, and God hath not said that the believer shall live forever, then we are under no delusion in expecting so to live. God's Word is the surest thing that can be, and we are not ashamed to hold on to any claim which truthfully arises out of it. We dare believe

that God will keep his word to us and to all other believers.

Brethren, *we are not ashamed as to the absolute certainty that our hope will be realized.* We believe that if indeed we are justified by faith, and have peace with God, we have a hope of glory which will not fail us in the end, nor on the way to the end. We do not expect to be deserted, and to be left to fall from grace, for "He hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." We do not expect to be left to ourselves, which would mean our sure and certain ruin; but we do expect that he that hath begun a good work in us will perfect it unto the day of Christ: we are certain that he that hath wrought this hope in us will justify that hope by fulfilling it in due time. He will preserve us through long life if we are to live long; will maintain a living hope in us when we come to die; and will remember even our dust and ashes when these are hidden in the tomb. "Who shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord?" It is written, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." And so it shall be. He shall not perish from the way, nor in the way. Hath he not said, "I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me"? He keepeth the feet of his saints. "I give unto my sheep," saith he, "eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." Never shall we be deceived in our trust in Jesus. No man shall say, "I trusted the Lord Christ to keep me, and he has not kept me; I rested in Jesus to preserve me, in spiritual life, and he has not preserved me." Never. We shall not be ashamed of our hope.

II. As I have introduced to you that confidence

which makes believers—especially tried and experienced believers—full of hope which maketh not ashamed, my second object is to dwell upon THE REASON OF THIS CONFIDENCE. Why is it that men who possess the good hope are so far from being ashamed of it that they rejoice in it?

My answer, is first, because *that hope has for one of its main supports the love of God*. I expect one day to sit among the angels, and to behold the face of my Best-beloved; but I do not expect this because of anything in me, or anything which may ever be done by me, but simply because of the infinite love of God. I trust not to my love of God, but to God's love to me. We trust him because he loves us. We are sure that he will fulfil our hope because he is too loving to fail us. It is from the love of God that all our hopes begin, and it is upon the love of God that all our hopes depend. If it were not for the Father's love, there had never been a covenant of grace; if it were not for his infinite love, no atoning sacrifice had been provided; if it were not for his active love, no Holy Spirit would have quickened and renewed us; if it were not for his unchanging love, all that is good in us would soon pass away; if it were not for love almighty, love immutable, love unbounded, we should never hope to see the face of the King in his beauty in the land that is very far off. He loveth us, and therefore he leadeth us, and feedeth us, and keepeth us evermore. Do not your hearts confess this? If that love could be suspended for a moment, if its outgoings were for an instant to cease, where would you be? We fall back upon the love of God as the final reason of our hope in him.

Observe, dear brethren, the actual cause of our con-

fidence is that *the love of God has been shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost*. Let me try and explain what this means. The Holy Spirit is in the heart of every believer, and he is occupied in many gracious acts. Amongst other things he sheds abroad the love of God in the heart wherein he resides. The figure is taken from a box of precious perfume being poured out in a chamber. There lies the slumbering scent within the alabaster box: it is a very choice thing, but no one has yet perceived its odor. The love of God brought within the soul is that rare fragrance; but till it is shed abroad it is not enjoyed. Now the Holy Spirit takes that box and opens it, and the sweet savour of divine love streams forth, and fills all the capacity of the believer. This love penetrates, and permeates, enters, and *occupies the entire being*. A delightful perfume streams through the entire room when the otto of roses is poured out; and even so when the love of God is thought upon by the devout heart, and the Holy Spirit helps its meditations, the theme fills the mind, the memory, the imagination, the reason, and the affections. It is an engrossing subject, and is not to be confined to any one faculty any more than you could keep the aroma of spices within a certain narrow space.

Moreover, as perfume gives delight to the nostril, so the love of God, when shed abroad in the power of the Holy Spirit, *imparts a singular sweetness to our emotions*. All the garments of the Lord of love smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia. Where can such sweetness be as in the love of God? That the eternal and the infinite One should really love men, and love them at such a rate as he has done, is a truth at once surprising and gladsome. It is a root from which

springs the lily of perfect joy. This is an ivory palace wherein every dweller is made glad. You may meditate upon that love till you are ravished, and carried away by it, and your soul, or ever you are aware, becomes like the chariots of Amminadib.

Yet again, wherever perfume comes, it not only spreads itself abroad, and gives delight to all who are in the place, but it *abides there*. Take the ointment away if you will, but the sweet odor remains for many an hour in the room which was once filled with it. Some scent appears to abide for ever. You went to your drawer the other day, and there was a delicious flavor of lavender; yet there had been no lavender there since last summer: fragrance lingers. A few drops of the true otto will perfume a wide space, and remain long after the vase from which it was poured has been taken away. The love of God, when it comes into the heart, and is shed abroad by the Holy Ghost, who is the great Master of the art of diffusing love, abides in the heart world without end. All things else may cease, but love abides. For a moment we may seem to forget the love of God amidst the business of the world; but no sooner is the pressure removed than we return unto our rest. The sweet perfume of divine love overcomes the rankness of the odor of sin, and never quits the heart that has once known its exceeding deliciousness. If I change the figure, I may say that the love of God is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost like one of yonder rain clouds, black with exceeding blessing, which pours forth a shower of silver drops innumerable, fertilizing every place whereon it falls, making the drooping herbs to lift up their heads and rejoice in the heaven-sent revival. After a while, from that

spot where fell the rain, there rises a gentle steam, which ascends to heaven and forms fresh clouds: thus is the love of God poured upon our heart, and shed abroad in our nature till our spirit drinks it in, and its new life is made to put forth its flowers of joy and fruits of holiness, and by-and-by grateful praise ascends like the incense which in the temple smoked upon Jehovah's altar. Love is shed abroad in us, and it works upon our heart to love in return.

To leave the figures: the shedding abroad of the love of God in the heart by the Holy Ghost means this—he imparts to us an *intense appreciation* and sense of that love. We have heard of it, believe in it, and meditated upon it, and at last we are overpowered by its greatness! “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son.” We cannot measure such love. We become affected by it; we are filled with wonder and admiration. Its greatness, its singularity, its speciality, its infinity—all these amaze us. It is shed abroad in our hearts. Then there comes an *appropriation* of it. We cry, “He loved *me*, and gave himself for *me*.” We begin to feel that God's love was not only love to men in general, but love to ourselves in particular, and we are now fairly carried off our feet. In a belief of this special love to us we are ready to dance for joy. Faith perceives that it is even so, and then we praise the Lord upon the high-sounding cymbals. Then follows, as a matter of course, that *return of love* which the human heart must feel: we love him because he first loved us. We did doubt his love once; we cannot doubt it now. If we were asked three times, “Lovest thou me?” we should answer humbly, but most emphatically, “Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee. I could not

live without loving thee. I would rather a thousand times that I had never been born than be without love to thee; and though I do not love thee as I ought, and my heart craves after a far greater love, yet I do love thee in deed and in truth. Thou knowest that I do; and I should be false to my own consciousness if I denied it." This is to have the love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost which is given to us: to know it, enjoy it, appropriate it, rejoice in it, and come under its divine influence. May this bundle of myrrh never be removed from the chamber of my soul!

But I want you to notice *the special sweetness which struck our apostle* as being so amazingly noteworthy. He goes on to tell us what most affected him. He says, "When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." That is the first point to be dwelt upon: that God should give his Son to die *for the ungodly*. That God should love those who love him, that God should love his renewed people who are striving after holiness, is indeed delightful; but the most overpowering thought of all is that he loved us when there was nothing good in us whatever. He loved us from before the foundation of the world: regarding us as being fallen and lost, his love resolved to send his Son to die for us. Jesus came not because we were good, but because we were evil; he gave himself not for our righteousness, but for our sins. The moving cause of love in God was not excellence in the creature then existing or foreseen to exist, but simply the good pleasure of the God of love. Love was born of God himself. It was so great in the heart of God that

"He saw us ruined in the fall,
Yet loved us notwithstanding all."

He loved us when we hated him; he loved us when we opposed him, when we cursed him, when we persecuted his people, and blasphemed his ways. Marvellous fact! Oh, that the Holy Ghost would bring home that truth to our hearts, and make us feel its energy! I cannot put the thought fitly before you, much less shed it abroad within you, but the Holy Ghost can do it, and then how charmed you will be, how humbled and yet how full of praise to the Most High God!

The apostle is not content with bringing that point before us: he would not have us forget that Christ *died for us*. Brethren, that Christ should love us in heaven was a great thing; that he should then come down to earth and be born in Bethlehem was a greater thing. That he should live a life of obedience for our sakes was a wonderful thing; but that he should die, this is the climax of love's sacrifice: the summit of the Alp of love. Some sights in the world astonish us once or twice, and then grow commonplace; but the cross of Christ grows upon us; the more we know of it the more it surpasses knowledge. To a saint who has been saved two thousand years, the sacrifice of Calvary is even more a marvel than when first he saw it. That God himself should take our nature, and that in that nature he should die a death like that of a felon upon a gibbet to save us who were his enemies, is a thing which could not be believed if it had been told us on less authority than the divine. It is altogether miraculous; and if you let it take possession of your soul until it is shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Ghost, you will feel that there is nothing worth knowing, believing, or admiring when compared with this. Nothing can ever rival in interest

the cross of Christ. Let us study what books we may, the knowledge of a crucified Saviour will still remain the sublimest of all the sciences.

Furthermore, the apostle then goes on to say that *the Lord must ever love us now that we are reconciled*. He puts it thus—If God loved us when we were enemies, he will surely continue to love us now that we are friends. If Jesus died for us when we were rebels, he will refuse us nothing now that he has reconciled us. If he reconciled us by his death, surely he can and will save us by his life. If he died to reconcile enemies, surely he will preserve the reconciled. Do you see the whole argument? It is very full of reasons for the upholding of our hope of glory, and causing us not to be ashamed of it. When the great God makes us feel the exceeding greatness of his love, we banish all doubt and dread. We infer from the character of his love as seen in the past that he cannot possibly cast us away in the future. What, die for us, and then leave us! What, pour out his heart's blood for our redemption, and yet permit us to be lost! Will he manifest himself to us as he doth not to the world, robed in the crimson of his own atonement through death, and then will he after all say to us, "Depart ye cursed"? Impossible! He changes not. Our hope has for the keystone of its arch the unchanging love of Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever. The Holy Ghost has so shed abroad the love of God in Christ Jesus in our hearts that we feel quite sure that none can separate us from it, and so long as we are not divided from it our hope of glory is sure as the throne of the Eternal.

Once more: the apostle reminds us in the eleventh verse that "*we have now received the atonement.*" We

already feel that we are at one with God. Through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus we are at peace with God. We love him; our quarrel with him is ended: we delight in him, we long to glorify him. Now this delightful sense of reconciliation is a satisfactory assurance of grace and glory. The hope of glory burns in the golden lamp of a heart reconciled to God by Jesus Christ. Inasmuch as we are now in perfect accord with God, longing only to be and to do just what he would have us to be and to do, we have the beginnings of heaven within us, the dawn of the perfect day. Grace is glory in the bud. Agreement with God is the seed-corn of perfect holiness and perfect happiness. If we are under the dominion of holiness; if there is no wish in our soul but what we would unwish if we knew it to be contrary to the mind of our holy Lord, then are we assured that he has accepted us, and that we have his life in us, and shall finally come to his glory. He that has brought his enemies to be his hearty friends will not permit this gracious work to be undone, or his holy purpose to fail. In our present delight in God we have the earnest of our endless joy in him. Therefore we are not ashamed of our hope.

One word more on this point: note well that the apostle not only mentions the love of God and its being shed abroad in our hearts, but he mentions *the divine Person by whom this has been done*. The shedding abroad of God's love in the heart has been wrought by the Holy Ghost who has been given to us. Only by the Holy Ghost could this have been done. Would you ever have been charmed with the love of God through the influence of the devil? Would you ever have been overpowered and filled with excessive joy in the love of God through the power of your own fallen hu-

man nature? Judge ye! They that have felt the love of God shed abroad in their heart can say without a doubt, "This is the finger of God; the Holy Ghost has wrought this in me." Nothing short of the Holy Spirit can effect it. "Thank God," saith one, "I sat under an earnest ministry!" So you might, and yet have never felt the love of God within your heart. We can shed that love abroad by preaching, but we cannot shed it abroad *in the heart*. A higher influence than that of human oratory must deal with the inner nature. Perhaps you were alone in your chamber, or walking by the roadside, when the sweet savour of love stole into your soul. Oh, the love of God! The amazing, immeasurable, incomprehensible love of the Father! Oh, to feel this till our very souls are inflamed with it, and our unloving nature is all on fire with love to the great Lover of the souls of men! Who can do this but the Holy Ghost? And how come we to have the Holy Ghost but by the free gift of God, whose gifts and calling "are without repentance"? God does not give and take; but his gifts are ours for ever. If the Holy Ghost has been given to you, is he not the pledge of God's love? Does not the New Testament describe him as the earnest of the inheritance? Is not an earnest the security for all the rest? Does the Holy Ghost set his seal to a document, which, after all, is so faulty that it will not effect its purpose? Never. If the Holy Ghost dwells in you, he is the guarantee of everlasting joy. Where grace is given by his divine indwelling, glory must follow it. The Holy Ghost, when he comes into the soul, comes that there he may take up his dwelling-place; and there he will abide till we shall be caught up to the higher realms, to behold our Lord's face for ever.

III. Lastly, let us hint at THE RESULT OF THIS CONFIDENT HOPE. Let the context instruct us.

First, this confident hope breeds *inward joy*. The man that knows that his hope of glory will never fail him because of the great love of God, of which he has tasted, that man will hear music at midnight; the mountains and the hills will break forth before him into singing wherever he goes. Especially in times of tribulation he will be found "rejoicing in hope of the glory of God." His profoundest comfort will often be enjoyed in his deepest affliction, because then the love of God will specially be revealed in his heart by the Holy Ghost, whose name is "the Comforter." Then he will perceive that the rod is dipped in mercy, that his losses are sent in fatherly love, and that his aches and pains are all measured out with gracious design. In our affliction God is doing nothing to us which we should not wish for ourselves if we were as wise and loving as God is. O friends! you do not want gold to make you glad, you do not even need health to make you glad; only get to know and feel divine love, and the fountains of delight are unsealed to you—you are introduced to the banquets of felicity.

This brings with it the grace of *holy boldness* in the avowal of our hope. Christian people do not often enough show worldlings the joy of their hope. We do not wear our best liveries, nor say enough of the joy of being in the Lord's service, nor speak enough of the wages which our Lord will pay at the end of the day. We are as silent as if we were ashamed of our hope. We even go mourning, although we have reason to be the happiest men on God's earth. I fear we have not enough experience of divine love shed abroad in our hearts. If the perfume were within, it would be per-

ceived by those who are around us. You pass a factory of perfume, and at once perceive that sweetness steals abroad. Let us make worldlings know the fragrance of our joyous hope: especially let us tell those who seem most likely to laugh at us; for we have learned by experience that some of these are most likely to be impressed. Often has a new convert written to a worldly friend to tell him of his great change and of his new joy, and that worldly friend has put the letter aside with a sneer or a jest; but after a while he has thought it over, and he has said to himself, "There may be something in it. I am a stranger to this joy of which my friend speaks, and I certainly need all the joy I can get, for I am dull enough." Let me tell you that all worldlings are not such fools as some would take them for; they are aware of an unrest within their bosoms, and they hunger after something better than this vain world can give them; so that it frequently happens that as soon as they learn where the good is they accept it. Even if they do not hunger, I do not know any better way of making a man long for food than yourself to eat. The looker-on feels his mouth water: an appetite arrives on a sudden. In the parable of the prodigal son the servants were ordered to bring forth the best robe and put it on him, and to put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: but the father did not tell them to take the son and make him eat. What he said was, "Let us eat and be merry." He knew that at the sight of others feasting his hungry son would fall to. When you who belong to the divine family eat and drink in happy fellowship, and are merry with the Lord in feasting upon love divine, the poor hungry brother will desire to join you, and he will be encouraged to do so.

Come, then, you that have a hope of glory; let all men see that you are not ashamed of it. Act as decoy birds to others: let the sweet notes of your happy life charm them to Jesus! May the Lord cause you to spread abroad what he has shed abroad, and may that which perfumes your heart also perfume your house, your business, your conversation, and your whole life! May we so enjoy true godliness that we may never bring shame upon it, nor feel shame concerning it!

XI.

A SEASONABLE EXHORTATION.

July 11, 1886.

“Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”—1 PETER i. 13.

To read the whole chapter is most helpful to the understanding of our text. If we have studied it carefully we must have said to ourselves, “How full of their Lord were the minds of these holy writers!” Peter can scarcely write a verse without an allusion to the Lord Jesus Christ. He was not only “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,” but you can see that his heart was steeped and saturated in memories of his Master: he could hardly get through a sentence without some allusion to the death, the resurrection, or the second coming of his beloved Lord. Oh that my ministry might always be of the same sort, dripping with the holy unction of the Saviour’s name! Brethren, may your conversations and your lives be full of the Lord Jesus Christ, that men may take knowledge of you, that you have been with Jesus and have learned of him.

A second thought will have occurred to you: How ardently these men expected the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ! Peter was continually speaking of it; and so was his beloved brother Paul. They hoped that Christ might come while they were yet alive:

they evidently looked upon his advent as very near. They were not mistaken in this last belief. It is very near. A long time has passed, say you? I answer, By no manner of means: two thousand years is not a long time in the count of God, nor in reference to so grand a business. If a thousand years be with God as one day, if the Lord does not come for the next twenty thousand years, we shall not be able truthfully to say that he delayeth his coming; for with a history, of which the chief fact is the death of Christ, there may well be due pause and ample verge for working out its infinite problems. We are dealing with eternal things, and what are ages? Let us patiently wait. "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise as some men count slackness;" let us persevere in the same belief which filled the minds of the early believers, that Jesus will come, that he may come at any time, and that he will surely come quickly. Brethren, ere the word which now proceeds from my lips shall have reached your ear, the Lord may come in his glory. Be ye as men that look for his coming at any moment.

It is equally noticeable that while apostolic men looked for the coming of Christ, they looked for it with no idea of dread, but, on the contrary, with the utmost joy. In this chapter, Peter sets forth the glorious advent of our Lord as an event to be hoped for with eagerness. He speaks of "the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." It was to him, therefore, not a day of terror, and of thunders, and of overwhelming confusion; but a day of the consummation of the work of grace, a period in which glory should crown the grace received through the first manifestation of the Lord. It was all joy to the early believers to think of the Lord's appearing.

The falling stars, the darkened sun, the blood-red moon, the quivering earth, the skies rolled up like an outworn vesture—all these things had no horror for them since Jesus was thus coming. Though all creation should be on a blaze, and the elements should melt with fervent heat, yet Jesus was coming, and that was enough for them: the Bridegroom of their souls was on his way, and this was rapture to their expectant spirits.

Observe also, once more: How constantly they were urging this as a motive! Peter never holds it out as a mere matter of speculation, nor exclusively as a ground of comfort; but he is constantly using the Lord's glorious appearing as the grand motive for action, for holiness, for watchfulness. Our text is a case in point: "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." My brethren, let us not set aside a truth which is evidently meant for our stimulus, our strength, and our sanctification; but let us receive it into our hearts, and pray that God may bless it to our practical profiting in all time to come.

I intend to handle the text with special view to the present time. It seems to me that there never was text more appropriate for any day than this one for the time now passing. It begins, as you notice, with *girding up the loins of your mind*. These are days of great looseness: everywhere I see great laxity of doctrinal belief, and gross carelessness in religious practice. Christian people are doing to-day what their forefathers would have loathed. Multitudes of professors are but very little different from worldlings. Men's religion seems to hang loosely about them, as

if it did not fit them: the wonder is that it does not drop off from them. Men are so little braced up as to conscientious conviction and vigorous resolve, that they easily go to pieces if assailed by error or temptation. The teaching necessary for to-day is this: "Gird up the loins of your mind," brace yourselves up; pull yourselves together; be firm, compact, consistent, determined. Do not be like quicksilver, which keeps on dissolving and running into fractions; do not fritter away life upon trifles, but live to purpose, with undivided heart, and decided resolution.

These are equally days in which it is necessary to say "*be sober.*" We are always having some new fad or another brought out to infatuate the unstable. Very good but very weak-minded people are apt to make marvellous discoveries, and to cry them up as if they had found the philosopher's stone. In my short time, I have heard, "Lo here!" and I have listened; and "Lo there!" and I have listened: the call has come from a third, fourth, fifth, sixth quarter in quick succession, and after all there was nothing worth a thought. The whole world has been going to be enlightened by some new light which Peter and Paul never saw, something far superior to anything known by any of the saints or sages of the church: but the grand illumination has not yet come off. "Be sober"; keep your feet; possess your souls; do not be carried away with every wind of doctrine; do not be little babies to believe everything that is told you, whether it be a ghost story or a fairy tale. Be sober: quit yourselves like men that have their wits about them. A very necessary word this, in times when everybody seems excited; and some are so bewildered that they do not know their head from their heels. Crowds are

prepared to follow any kind of foolery, whatever it may be, as long as it is advocated by clever men, and is made to tickle their fancy. Do but shout loudly enough, and many will answer: do but set open the door and beckon, and they will rush in, whatever the entertainment may be. Brethren, "be sober," and judge for yourselves.

Nor is the third exhortation at all unnecessary: "*Hope to the end.*" Certain of us have to confess that the outlook appears to us very dark and dismal. Our surroundings seem full of fear; and we are apt to grow despondent, if not almost despairing: wisely, then, doth bold Peter say to us, "Hope to the end." You who love the truth, do not despair of its success; you who hold to the good old ways, do not dream that everybody will desert them; do not give way to distrust as to the issues of the conflict. Be so hopeful as to be "calm mid the bewildering cry, confident of victory."

Put these three exhortations into one: pull yourselves together, be steady, and be hopeful. There you have the practical run of the text. I desire earnestly that, by God's Spirit, we may carry it into practice henceforth and ever.

In asking you attention to the text, I notice, first, *an argument*—"Wherefore"; secondly, *an exhortation*—"gird up the loins of your mind: be sober, and hope to the end"; and thirdly, *an expectation*—"hope to the end, for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

I. First, then, here is AN ARGUMENT, indicated by "wherefore." True religion is not unreasonable: it is common sense set to heavenly music. Albeit that true religion may be above reason, it is never contrary

to reason; but if we had the reason of God, our reason would teach us what his Holy Spirit has revealed. Pure religion is pure truth; God help us to be sure of this! Holiness is also a direct logical inference from revelation. I like to notice the epistles with their "therefores" and "wherefores." If you read the First Epistle of Peter, you have in this verse "wherefore"; and in the eighteenth verse "forasmuch"; and in the twenty-second verse "seeing then." The second chapter begins with "wherefore"; the sixth verse has its "wherefore"; the seventh its "therefore"; and the rest of the chapter is studded with the argumentative word "for." Peter might seem to be too impetuous to be argumentative; but it is clear that to him godliness was a matter of argument, that he saw a distinct connection between the doctrine of grace and a holy life. Here in our text he saith, "*Wherefore* gird up the loins of your mind."

Will you kindly follow me while I run over his argument? I shall have to give you only an outline of it. Here it is.

He begins by saying, "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience, and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." See, brethren, you are elected to a very high privilege; you are chosen of God from before the foundation of the world, out of his free favor, that you should be a sanctified, obedient, and cleansed people; wherefore, since God has chosen you to this, do not give way to the world, but gird up your loins to contend with it; be not carried away with every novelty, be sober; do not be downcast and dispirited, but bravely hope. Shall the elect of God be timorous? Shall those who are chosen of the Most

High give way to despair? God forbid! There is an argument, then, in the first and second verses, forcibly supporting the precepts of the text. If we had time to elaborate it, we should see that it well behoves the elect of God to choose his service resolutely, to abide in it steadfastly, and hope for its reward with supreme confidence.

But next, Peter declares that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has "begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." O ye begotten of God, see that ye live as such! You are twice-born men: live not the low life of the merely natural man. You are of the blood royal, you are descended from the King of kings; degrade not your descent! You are born, not to death, as you were at your first birth, but unto life. Though you pass through the grave, you shall not remain there. The charnel-house is no home for your body; you shall come up out of the grave, for you are begotten again unto a hope most full of life by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Wherefore, gird up your loins. If it be so that there is this new life in you, a life eternal as the life of God, then be not cast down; pull your girdle close about you; keep yourself free from the oppressive cares and temptations of the world; and stand with holy hope, expecting the coming of your Lord from heaven. That is a good argument, is it not? Your election and your regeneration call you to holy living.

Further, the apostle goes on to say that you are heirs of "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you." For you the harp of gold; for you the starry crown, the endless victory, the sight of the King in his beau-

ty. For you the sitting upon the throne of Jesus, even as he has overcome, and has sat down with his Father upon his throne. Courage, then, brethren, if this be your destiny: if within a month you may be in heaven; if within a brief period you shall be exalted to share the rest of your Redeemer, do not be cast down, nor overwhelmed with trouble, nor dismayed by the aboundings of sin, nor even by your own personal temptations. "Gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end; for your end must be glorious! Good argument, is it not? Then he goes on to say that you are "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time." God himself surrounds you as with a wall of fire. Until omnipotence can be vanquished, until immutability can be changed, until the immortal God can die, not one of his chosen people shall be destroyed. "Kept by the power of God, what power can destroy us? Wherefore, brethren, be brave and confident. Shall such a man as I flee? Kept by the power of God, shall I tremble? If the power of God keeps me, shall I "reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man"? If the power of God keeps me, shall I be hopeless? Shall I speak like one that has no hereafter to rejoice in? It cannot be so: if God doth keep us we will keep our hope even to the end. Is not that a good argument?

Further, the apostle goes on to say that we may be passing through needful trial, but it is only for a little while. "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto

praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." See, beloved, the apostle declares that you must be tried even as gold must be put into the furnace: you have faith, and faith must be tested; it is according to its nature and divine purpose. The faith of Abraham was sharply tried, and so must the faith of all believers be. That your religion may be really solid metal, and not an imitation of it, or a mere gilded bauble, you must be tried. Your Master was tried: not without fighting did he win his crown; not without labor did he enter into his reward. There is a needs-be for our present affliction. God hath a design in it—that he may have praise and glory and honor at the appearing of his dear Son; a praise, and glory, and honor in which we shall share. Come, then, brethren, if this fire is to be passed through, let us gird up our loins to dash through it. Let us not fear, for the Lord hath said, "When thou passest through the fire I will be with thee, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." My brethren, if for a little time we must be tried, let us set our faces like flints to bear the trial. Let us not be intoxicated with sorrow or fear. Since God hath a grand design in it, let us bow ourselves to his divine will, and only ask that his holy design may be fully answered. Let us hope to be sustained in the trial, and sanctified as the result of it, and let no unbelieving fear cast a cloud over our sky. Is not this good argument?

Nor is this all. He tells us that even while we are in trials we are still full of joy. Read the eighth verse concerning "Jesus Christ, whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." Beloved, we who love the Lord have our joy

even in our present adversity. We have two heavens; a heaven here and a heaven hereafter. Jesus is with us, and this is heaven; we are soon to be with Jesus, and that is another heaven. Though sometimes cast down, we are glad at heart.

“I would not change my blest estate
For all that earth calls good or great.”

Give me but the company of the sweet Lord Jesus, and I ask no greater felicity. Yes, let me go back to my bed and my pain if I may have Jesus there. Better to lie in a dungeon, and pine on bread and water with Christ's company, than to sit in a parliament of kings, and be yourself their emperor and be without the Lord. Saints find everything in Christ when they have nothing else; and they equally find everything in him when earthly comforts are multiplied. Beloved, if it be so, then let us gird up the loins of our mind, and be sober, and hope to the end. He that is with us now and makes all our sorrows work for good will be with us even to the end. Come life, come death, our Lord's presence provides us with an all-sufficiency. If his presence shall go with us, and he will give us peace, we need not stipulate as to the road. Wherefore let us not be dismayed, nor even think of doubting. Is not this good argument?

Once more: the apostle goes on to say that the gospel which we believe, and which we teach, and for which we are ready to suffer, and even to die, is a gospel that comes to us with the sanction of the prophets. The Holy Ghost moved upon those choice spirits, so that they spoke to us concerning the sufferings of Christ, and the glory which should follow. It seems to me, brethren, that with such men as Moses

and David, Isaiah and Jeremiah, to support our faith, we need not be ashamed of our company, nor tremble at the criticisms of the moderns. We ought rather to gird up the loins of our mind, and give our whole soul to the proclamation of a gospel which is rendered venerable by the testimony of inspired men of all ages. Be sober and steadfast in the belief of the old faith; never be moved by anything that modern rationalism or ancient unbelief may have to say. For not only do the prophets assure us that we follow no cunningly-devised fable, but the angels stand gazing into it with strong desire to know more of it. The daily study of cherubim and seraphim is the revelation of God in Christ. I tell you, sirs, that the gospel which to-day is hacked in pieces by the wise men of this world, who tell us that they have found out something more in harmony with growing enlightenment, is still the admiration of every holy one who walks you golden streets, or waits before the burning throne. Still do angels and principalities and powers admire the mystery of the Incarnate God, and the substitutionary atonement made for men by the crucified Lord. They never cease to wonder and adore concerning the glorious gospel of the blessed God. Standing, then, side by side with prophets, looking with intent gaze to the same object which fixes the attention of angels, we are not abashed by ridicule, nor disquieted by opposition. We stand fast, as upon a rock, girding up the loins of our mind, and hoping to the end. There again is right good argument. Is it not so?

II. I beg you, dear friends, to follow me to the next head of discourse, namely, THE EXHORTATION. The exhortation is a triplet: "Gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end."

The first exhortation, "*Gird up the loins of your mind,*" sounds very sweetly in my ears. I do not know whether it raises in your minds echoes, as it does in mine. I fancy that Peter had a noticeable habit of pulling his garments together. I read of him that he "girt his fisher's coat unto him, for he was stripped." Almost every body has some personal peculiarity and mannerism; and it may have been the way of Peter to be often tightening his girdle. Hence the Saviour—and here is the music of the text to me—said to him by the sea, after he had said, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?"—"When thou wast young thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest; but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God." That word "gird," while it had something to do with Peter's old habit, is now sanctified by that blessed word which his Master had given him. Turning to the Lord's people, whom he desires to feed, he says to them, "*Gird up the loins of your mind.*" My Master talked of my girding my loins, and of my being girt. I say now to you, gird up the loins of your mind. Do you not think he borrowed the expression from the Lord Jesus? I think he did.

Moreover, he was writing to Hebrew strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia. May he not have had ringing in his ears for these Hebrews the words of Moses to their fathers when they were strangers in Egypt? They were to eat the passover with their loins girded and their staves in their hands. Thus would Peter have his brother "strangers" live in expectation of their

complete deliverance and home-going, which was drawing near. I detect an echo of Egypt and the Paschal supper in this word.

Or did Peter wish them to be ready to rejoice in the great blessing which was soon to come to them? Were they to be ready to leap and run for joy? We read of Elias, that when he heard the sound of an abundance of rain, he girded himself and ran before Ahab's chariot; and so when we hear of the grace that is to be revealed at the coming of our Lord, we are ready to run without weariness and walk without fainting. Oh that every servant of God would gird up his loins to run and meet his Master's chariot; for the King is on his way! He cometh! He cometh! Go ye forth to meet him. Meeting him, it is but fit that ye should be found as servants prepared to do his bidding and run on his errands.

The exact meaning of the metaphor, "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind," is to be found in the form of oriental dress, which requires the use of a girdle, and the girdling of it tightly, lest the garments should entangle the feet of the traveller, or otherwise hinder his action.

"Gird up the loins of your mind." My brethren, that certainly teaches us, in the first place, *earnestness*. A man going to work tucks up his sleeves, and tightens his robes. He has something to do which demands all his strength, and, therefore, he cannot afford to have anything hanging loosely about him, to hinder him. We brace ourselves for a supreme effort: and the Christian life is always such. We must always be in earnest if we would be disciples of our earnest Lord.

Does it not also mean *preparedness*? When a man has girt his garments about him, he is ready for his

work. A true believer should be ready for suffering or service—ready, indeed, for anything. A servant standing with his loins girt signifies that whatever the message may be from his Master, he is ready to deliver it: whatever the errand, he is ready to run upon it. He only needs the word, and he will not hesitate, but will obey at once. This is the position which Christian people should always occupy. You should be earnestly prepared for the will of the Lord, let it be what it may. The future is to you unknown, but you are in a fit condition to meet it, whatever form it may assume.

But the figure means more than this; does it not? It means *determination*, and hearty resolution. The man who girds himself up for a work means that he is resolved to do it at once. He has made up his mind; no shilly-shallying remains with him, no hesitancy, no questioning, no holding back; he is set upon his course and is not to be moved from it. You will never get to heaven, any of you, by playing at religion. There will be no climbing the hill of the Lord without effort; no going to glory without the violence of faith. I believe that the ascent to heaven is still, as Bunyan described it—a staircase, every step of which will have to be fought for. He heard sweet singers on the roof of the palace, singing,

“Come in! come in!
Eternal glory thou shalt win.”

Many had a mind to enter the palace and win that eternal glory; but then at the doorway stood a band of warlike men, with drawn swords, to wound and kill every man that ventured to enter. Therefore many who would have liked to have walked on the top of

the palace did not care for so dangerous an enterprise; they desired the end, but not the way to it. At last there came one with a determined countenance, and he said to the writer with the inkhorn by his side, "Set down my name, sir"; and when his name was duly recorded, he drew his sword and rushed upon the armed men with all his might. It was a fierce conflict, but he meant to conquer or die, and he did conquer: he cut a lane through his enemies, and by-and-by he, too, was heard singing with the rest,

"Come in! come in!
Eternal glory thou shalt win."

By conflict throughout a whole life we come to our rest; and there is no other way. You cannot go round to a back-door, and enter into heaven by stealth. You must fight if you would reign. Wherefore, gird up the loins of your mind.

Once more, the figure teaches us, that our life must be *concentrated*. "Gird up the loins of your mind." We have no strength to spare; we cannot afford to let part of our force leak away. We need to bring all our faculties to bear upon one point, and exert them all to one end. Much can be done by concentration. The rays of the sun are warm; but if you collect them into a focus, by a burning-glass, you produce a fire which else you could not find in them. Concentrate your emotions upon the love of Jesus! Concentrate your faculties upon faith in Jesus! Concentrate your whole being upon the glory of Jesus! You will accomplish marvels if you do this. A man who is all over the place is nowhere; but he whose life is one and indivisible is strong, and his influence will be felt in the service of his Master.

I cannot stay long upon one point, though there is so much to be said. The second exhortation is—“*Be sober.*” And does not that mean, first, moderation in all things? Do not be so excited with joy as to become childish. Do not grow intoxicated and delirious with worldly gain or honor. On the other hand do not be too much depressed with passing troubles. There are some who are so far from sobriety that, if a little goes wrong with them, they are ready to cry, “Let me die.” No, no.

“Be sober.” Keep the middle way: hold to the golden mean. There are many persons to whom this exhortation is most needful. Are there not men around us who blow hot to-day and cold to-morrow?—their heat is torrid, their cold arctic. You would think they were angels from the way they talk one day; but you might think they were angels of another sort from the manner in which they act at other times. They are so high up, or so low down that in each case they are extreme. To-day they are carried away with this, and the next carried away with that. I knew a Christian man right well to whom I was accustomed to use one salutation whenever I saw him. He was a good man, but changeable. I said to him, “Good morning, friend! what are you now?” He was once a valiant Arminian, setting young people right as to the errors of my Calvinistic teaching. A short time after, he became exceedingly Calvinistic himself, and wanted to screw me up several degrees; but I declined to yield. Anon he became a Baptist, and agreed with me on all points, so far as I know. This was not good enough, and therefore he became a Plymouth Brother: and after that he went to the Church from which he originally set out. When I next met him I said, “Good

morning, brother, what are you now?" He replied, "That is too bad, Mr. Spurgeon; you asked me the same question last time." I replied, "Did I? But what are you now? Will the same answer do?" I knew it would not. I would earnestly say to all such brethren, "Be sober. Be sober." It cannot be wise to stagger all over the road in this fashion. Make sure of your footing when you stand; make doubly sure of it before you shift.

To be sober means to have a calm, clear head, to judge things after the rule of right, and not according to the rule of mob. Be not influenced by those who cry loudest in the street, or by those who beat the biggest drum. Judge for yourselves as men of understanding. Judge as in the sight of God, with calm deliberation.

"Be sober," that is, be clear-headed. The man who drinks, and thus destroys the sobriety of his body, is befogged, and muddled, and has lost his way. Ceasing to be sober, he makes a fool of himself. Do not commit this sin spiritually. Be specially clear-headed and calm as to the things of God. Ask that the grace of God may so rule in your heart that you may be peaceful and serene, and not troubled with idle fear on one side or with foolish hope on the other.

"Be sober," says the apostle. You know the word translated "be sober" sometimes means "be watchful"; and indeed there is a great kinship between the two things. Live with your eyes open; do not go about the world half asleep. Many Christians are asleep. Whole congregations are asleep. The minister snores theology, and the people in the pews nod in *chorus*. Much sacred work is done in a sleepy style. You can have a Sunday-school, and teachers and chil-

dren can be asleep. You can have a tract-distributing society, with visitors going round to the doors all asleep; you can do everything in a dreamy way if so it pleases you. But says the apostle,—be watchful, be alive; brethren, look alive; be so awakened up by these grand arguments with which we have plied you already, that you shall brace yourselves up, and throw your whole strength into the service of your Lord and Master.

Finally, let us “*hope to the end.*” Never despair; never even doubt. Hope when things look hopeless. A sick and suffering brother rebuked me the other day for being cast down. He said to me, “We ought never to show the white feather: but I think you do sometimes.” I asked him what he meant, and he replied, “You sometimes seem to grow desponding and low. Now I am near to die, but I have no clouds and no fears.” I rejoiced to see him so joyous, and I answered, “That is right, my brother, blame me as much as you please for my unbelief, I richly deserve it.” “Why,” he said, “you are the father of many of us. Did you not bring me and my friend over yonder to Christ? If you get low in spirit after so much blessing, you ought to be ashamed of yourself.” I could say no other than, “I am ashamed of myself, and I desire to be more confident in the future.” Brethren, we must hope, and not fear. Be strong in holy confidence in God’s word, and be sure that his cause will live and prosper. Hope, says the apostle; hope to the end; go right through with it; if the worst comes to the worst, hope still. Hope as much as ever a man can hope; for when your hope is in God you cannot hope too much.

But let your hope be all in grace. Do not hope in

yourself or in your works; but "hope in the grace;" for so the text may be read. Hope, moreover, in the grace which you have not yet received, in "the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." Bless God for the grace that you have not yet obtained, for he has it in store for you; yea, he has put it on the road, and it is coming to you. When for the moment you seem to be slack in present grace, say, "Glory to God for all the grace I have not tasted yet." Hope for the grace which is to come with your coming Lord.

III. This has brought me to my last head, in which there is much of sweetness. I ask your patience while I dwell upon it. The third point is EXPECTATION: "Hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." What you have got to hope for, brethren, is more grace. God will always give you grace. He will never deal with you upon the ground of merit; that door is shut: he has begun with you in grace, and he will go on with you in grace, therefore "hope to the end for the grace."

Next, it is grace that is on the way to you. The Greek should be rendered, "Hope to the end for the grace that is being brought to you," or, "the grace that is a-bringing to you." Grace is coming to you with all speed. Jesus Christ is coming: he is on the way to earth: look for him soon to appear.

The grace you are to look for is grace linked with your Lord Jesus Christ: you never did receive any grace apart from him, and you never will.

The grace you are to hope for is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. He has been revealed once, at his first advent; hence the grace you have.

He is to be revealed very soon in his second advent; hence the grace that is a-coming to you. Think of the grace that is a-coming. "My ship is coming home," says the child. So also is mine: Jesus is coming, and that means all things to me. The golden chariot of my Lord is a-coming loaded down with unutterable love, and infinite joy, and eternal delight. Rejoice this morning for the grace that is a-coming, grace that is linked with Jesus Christ.

But what can this grace be that will be received at his coming? Justification? No: we have that already, by his resurrection. Sanctification? No, we have that already by being made partakers of his life. What is the grace that is to be revealed at his coming? Just look at the chapter, and you will read in the fifth verse, "Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time." *Perfect salvation* is one part of the grace which is to be brought in the last time when Christ comes. When he comes there will be perfection for our souls and salvation for our bodies. Peradventure, we may be alive when he comes; if so, we shall be changed in the twinkling of an eye into perfection; for "this corruption must put on incorruption." Peradventure, we may die before he comes; if so, it does not matter: though corruption, earth, and worms may have devoured this flesh, yet at his coming our body shall rise in the image of Christ's glorious body. We look for perfect salvation at the coming of Christ. This is the grace that is a-bringing to us, and is on the road now.

And that is not all. The second grace that Christ will bring with him when he comes is the *perfect vindication* of our faith: "that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth,

though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." To-day they sneer at our faith, but they will not do so when Jesus comes; to-day we ourselves tremble for the ark of the Lord, but we shall not do so when he comes. The coming of Christ in all the glory of the Father will be a vindication of our faith. Then shall all men say that believers were wise, prudent, philosophical. Those who believe in Jesus may be called fools to-day, but men will think otherwise when they see them shine forth as the sun in the Father's kingdom. Wait a wee bit: all will be cleared soon. Copernicus declared the truth that the earth and the planets revolve around the sun. His opponents replied that this could not be true, for if the planet Venus revolved around the sun, she must present the same phases as the moon. This was very true. Copernicus looked up to Venus, but he could not see those phases, nor could any one else, nevertheless he stuck to his statement, and said, "I have no reply to give, but in due time God will be so good that an answer will be found." Copernicus died, and his teaching had not yet been justified; but soon after Galileo came forward with his telescope, and on looking at Venus he saw that she did pass through exactly the same changes as the moon. Thus wisdom is justified of her children. Truth may not prevail to-day or to-morrow, but her ultimate victory is sure. To-day they say that the doctrines of grace are antiquated, obsolete, and even injurious. We are at no trouble to answer the charge. We can wait, and we do not doubt that public thought will alter its tone. I hear the sneering word, "You orthodox are fools, for you hold to exploded notions." Truly, sir, we do believe that which you please to say

is exploded; but we shall be found to be right when your new systems have come and gone, like vapors which appear for a little time, and then vanish away. He is coming who will justify all who believe in him, and award praise, and glory, and honor to their faith. If our gospel be a lie, it will prove to be a lie at his coming; but it is so true that we are not troubled at the prospect of the last great judgment. The mysteries which now perplex us will be solved when the mists are rolled away. Wherefore hope on for the grace that is to be revealed.

Once more: when Christ comes there will be a revelation of *perfect glory*. Read the eleventh verse: "Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when he testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." Now this is the grace which is to come to us when Christ appears. "Grace!" say you, "You mean glory." I do. Yet what is glory but grace come to perfection? Grace is glory in the bud, and glory is grace in the full flower. You believe in Jesus Christ, but as yet you do not see the glory that awaits you. Wait a little while. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."

I have brought you back to the second coming of Christ. I told you it was a practical doctrine. I want to leave that impression upon your minds, that you may go back to your daily work and constant struggle with the world. "Gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end,"—because there is wondrous grace to be revealed to you by-and-by. I should like you to act as an American—Colonel Da-

venport—did upon a certain occasion. One day, many years back, a thick darkness came over the United States. Now and then in London we have dreadfully dark days, for which we can scarcely account, but this was quite a new experience for the New Englanders, and caused a terrible sensation. So exceedingly black was it that the barn-door fowls went to roost in the middle of the day. The darkness grew worse, and people trembled in their houses, declaring that the end of the world was coming. They were all excited and alarmed. One of the houses of legislature adjourned under the belief that the Day of Judgment was come. The other house was sitting, and the blackness was no intense that everybody was awed. A motion was made that they should break up, as the end of the world had certainly arrived. Colonel Davenport objected, saying, “The judgment is either approaching, or it is not. If it is not, there is no cause for adjourning; and if it is, I choose to be found doing my duty. I wish, therefore, that candles may be brought.” Brethren, it is dark; but whatever is going to happen, or whatever is not going to happen, let us be found girded, sober, and hopeful. In these dark political times, these dark religious times, I call for candles, for we mean to go on working. Amen.

XII.

SECRET DRAWINGS GRACIOUSLY EXPLAINED.

Aug. 15, 1886.

“The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying. Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love : therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.”—*JEREMIAH xxxi. 3.*

THE dread of divine justice has often driven men to seek mercy. Many have been caught in the whirlwind of wrath, and in their dismay they have fled for refuge to that Man who is a covert from the tempest. Hence the Lord does not decline to work upon the minds of the guilty by motives drawn from fear. Notice the twenty-third and twenty-fourth verses of the previous chapter:—“Behold, the whirlwind of the Lord goeth forth with fury, a continuing whirlwind: it shall fall with pain upon the head of the wicked. The fierce anger of the Lord shall not return, until he have done it, and until he have performed the intents of his heart.” This is by no means a solitary passage. Holy Scripture is strewn with solemn admonitions to flee from the wrath to come. Our dear Redeemer, whose lips are as lilies dropping sweet-smelling myrrh, in great tenderness of heart warned men of the sure result of their sins; and none used stronger or more alarming language than he did concerning the future of ungodly men. He knew nothing of that pretended sympathy which will rather let men perish than warn them against perishing. Such tenderness is merely

selfishness excusing itself from a distasteful duty. Our Saviour spoke as the true and earnest lover of men, and therefore uttered words which, having first wounded his own heart, and brought the tears to his own eyes, went home with tremendous force to the minds of others. He spoke of weeping and gnashing of teeth, of a worm which dieth not, and of a fire which is not quenched. Weeping, he reminded them how often he would have gathered them together as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, but they would not; and warned them that therefore nothing could come of it but desolation and destruction. Brethren, like our Lord, we do not hesitate to warn men of judgment to come. "Knowing, therefore, the terrór of the Lord, we persuade men." We dare not quit this solemn duty lest it cost us our own souls; we dare not cease to sound the trumpet of alarm lest the enemy destroy our people, and their blood be required at our hands.

Still, the master-magnet of the gospel is not fear, but love. Penitents are drawn to Christ rather than driven. The most frequent impulse which leads men to Jesus is hope that in him they may find salvation. Truly, even then they are moved by fear of the evil which they would escape: but their feet are led to fly towards him by hope in his gentleness, his goodness, his readiness to receive sinners. Hope in that mercy of God which endureth for ever is the great cord which draws men to repentance. Consequently, after the Lord had sounded the clarion note of warning which we have just heard, he touched the harp-strings of grace and brought forth from them notes both soft and sweet, cheering the sad, and encouraging the despondent: these notes he knew would be heard where even

the trumpet sounded not. Love wins the day. One hair from the head of love will draw more than the cable of fear. Let but love speak a single word out of her heart, and let it reach the hearts of men, and it will accomplish greater marvels than all the prolonged discourses and threatenings of wrath. I am glad, therefore, that I have to speak to God's people this morning, and set forth God's love as the reason why they should love him in return. "We love him because he first loved us" is the great law of the Christian life. In proportion as we recognize the love of God, and know somewhat of its height, and depth, and length, and breadth, our heart will be graciously affected by it. When the love of God is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost which is given to us, then we love our Lord with all our might. I want you this morning to pray that you may realize the things which I speak to you, so that when we discourse upon the love of God you may feel it glowing in your own souls. Oh, that his love, like coals of juniper, may burn in our hearts! With their vehement flame may they consume our hearts with a heavenly passion, till all our nature ascends to heaven like clouds of incense from the golden altar! May our God and Father speak within each one of us, and say, "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee"!

I. Our first observation will run on this wise—
 GOD'S DEALINGS WITH US ARE NEVER UNDERSTOOD TILL HE HIMSELF APPEARS TO US. He must speak, or we cannot interpret his acts. "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." The Lord had been drawing these peo-

ple, but they did not know it. God has been loving them with an everlasting love, but they did not recognize it. Nor could they know or recognize his lovingkindness till the Lord himself visited them in person, and removed the scales from their eyes. God is his own interpreter. His providence and grace reveal him, but still more does he himself explain and reveal his providence and grace. Though all things in the field and the garden show what the sun doeth, yet none of these "fruits put forth by the sun" can be perceived till the sun himself reveals them.

For first, *man is not in a condition to perceive God till God reveals himself to him.* By nature, brethren, we are blind Godward; yea, deaf, and in all ways *insensible* towards the great spirit. By nature we are dead to the presence of the Lord. Naturally man is an atheist. When the "Essays and Reviews" made a great deal of stir, an experienced preacher said concerning them, "'Essays and Reviews' do not trouble me, nor any of the nostrums of modern doubt, for my heart is a deviser of worse things than 'Essays and Reviews': my evil heart is a fountain of atheism." Brethren, worse difficulties have occurred to us than any that have ever been penned by the most notorious infidels. By nature we are as the fool who said in his heart, "There is no God." Our carnal mind is enmity against God, and consequently it would be rid of him if it could. We have need to pray, and we do pray, "Save me from an atheistic heart, which hates the Trinity." Man, therefore, living in alienation from God, does not trace the inward drawings of divine love up to their source: he regards them as common things, and treads them out as sparks from an earthly fire.

Though God may be sweetly influencing the man to something better, and higher, and nobler than sin, and self, and the world, yet he does not perceive the divine working. The Lord said of Cyrus, "I girded thee, though thou hast not known me"; and even so may he say of many an unconverted man, "I warned thee, and aroused thee, and drew thee when thou wast not aware of me."

Besides this, my brethren, we are so *selfish* that, when God is drawing us to himself, we are too much absorbed in our own things to notice the hand which is at work upon us. We crave the world, we sigh for human approbation, we seek for ease and comfort, we desire above all things to indulge our pride with the vain notion of self-righteousness; and, therefore, we look not after God. Rather do we cry with Pharaoh, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice?" God may draw long before we will budge an inch away from those gods which our own selfishness hath set up. Young Samuel answered to the call of Jehovah at midnight; but with us there is neither hearing nor answering. How can we see God while our eyes are blinded with self?

While we are *carnal*, sold under sin, our heart is dead to the movements of God's grace. Only a spiritual mind can discern spiritual things; and as we are not spiritual, we remain insensible to the divine drawing. I know this was the case with me, and I speak therefore with a humbling experience clear in my memory: for many a day the Lord drew me, but I did not know him; the Lord wrought upon my heart, but I did not perceive him. Alas for the insensibility which even gospel influences cannot remove! The Lord must appear to each one of us, or we shall remain ignorant of his ways.

Moreover, dear friends, God must explain his dealings to us by revealing himself to us, because *those ways are in themselves frequently mysterious*. Take Israel, for an instance. The Lord moved Pharaoh to treat Israel with great severity, and to make them serve with rigor. They made bricks without straw, and the tale of bricks was doubled, till they cried by reason of their taskmasters. How was Israel to perceive that Jehovah was at the back of all this? Yet the Lord was thus accomplishing his design of bringing his chosen out of Egypt. The most difficult thing was not for Pharaoh to be compelled to let Israel go, but to bring the people into such a state that they would be willing to quit the fertile land. They lived in plenty in the land of Goshen, and did eat of the leeks, and the garlie, and the onions of Egypt; and had they been let alone, they would have had no wish to go forth to Canaan. They would have been satisfied to become Egyptians had they always been treated as they were treated at the first. How were the Israelites to understand, till God explained it, that this rough usage on the part of Pharaoh was to wean them from Egypt, and make them willing to go out even into a desert, that they might escape from the tyrant? When Pharaoh began to kill their firstborn, when he refused to let them go for a few days to offer sacrifice, and oppressed them more and more, how were they to know that this was a part of the plan of Jehovah who had loved them with an everlasting love? Even after he had smitten Pharaoh with all his plagues, and Egypt was glad when they departed, how could they comprehend why God led them down to the brink of the Red Sea? Between Migdol and the sea, over against Baal-zephon, the host was made to

encamp, even in a place from which there was no escape from their cruel foes, whose chariots they heard rattling behind them. How were they to know that the Lord had his way in the sea, and his path in the mighty waters? How could they guess that he meant to bring Egypt down into the depth of the sea, and there to crush the dragon with so heavy a blow, that through the forty years of Israel's sojourn in the wilderness, upon the Egyptian border, the nation should never be troubled by its old taskmaster? With a high hand, and an outstretched arm, the Lord brought forth his people, but they understood not his wonders in Egypt till he appeared unto them, and said, "I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." God's dealings with his chosen are often so mysterious that they cannot know them till they know himself.

So it is when the Lord works eternal life in the soul. He does not usually begin by giving the man light, and peace, and comfort. No, but he sorely plagues him with "darkness that might be felt!" He makes sweet sin to become bitter; he pours gall into the fountains of his carnal life till the man begins to be weary of the things which once contented him. Full often the Lord fitteth the arrows of conviction to the string, and shooteth again, and again, and again, till the soul is wounded in a thousand places, and is ready to bleed to death. The Lord kills before he makes alive. Is this the Lord's way of dealing with men? It is even so: it is the way of his loving kindness and tender mercy. But I say again, how could we expect unspiritual men to see the hand of the Lord in all this? The awakened man sees more of anger than of loving-kindness in his griefs, and the idea of everlasting

love never enters his imagination. That God is drawing him with bands of love and cords of a man, is a truth of which he has no inkling. God must reveal himself to the man, or else he will not discover the hand of the Lord in the anguish of his spirit.

This appearance of the Lord must be personal. “The Lord hath appeared of old unto *me*.” I do not think any man knows the Lord by merely reading Scripture nor by being convinced in his judgment of the truth of the gospel. There is a special manifestation of the Lord unto the conscience, and the heart, and the soul of every man who is indeed taught of God. A personal revelation by the Holy Ghost is needed to bring home to us the revelation of the Book. The result of it is conversion, or the new birth; and this is always effected by the Spirit of God. True knowledge of God is always a divine operation, not wrought at second-hand by instrumentality, but wrought by the right hand of the Lord himself. “No man can come to me,” saith Christ, “except the Father which hath sent me draw him”; and no man understands those drawings except the same Father shall come unto him and manifest himself to him. I do not ask the children of God whether they understand this, for I know they do. You can, many of you, say, “The Lord hath appeared unto me.” Not that you have heard a voice, nor seen a great light, as Saul did on the way to Damascus; but as vividly to your inward eye has God appeared as the great light appeared to Saul’s outward eye, and as potently to your secret ear has God spoken as that voice spoke to Saul’s outward ear. God has drawn nigh to us, and his visitations have new-created us. Till we know the Lord by personal revelation, we can-

not read his handwriting upon our hearts, or discern his dealings with us.

This appearance needs to be repeated. The text may be read as a complaint on the part of Israel. Israel says, "The Lord hath appeared *of old* unto me"—as much as to say, "He has not appeared to me lately." Of old he was seen by brook, and bush, and sea, and rock; when Jacob met him at Jabbok, and Moses in the wilderness at the burning bush; but now his visits are few and far between. "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me." Oh, that he would appear now! I pray at this time that those of you who are mourning after that fashion may be able to rise out of it. It is not the Lord's desire that he should be as a stranger in the land, or as a wayfaring man that tarrieth but for a night. He is willing to abide with us. His delights are with the sons of men. Let us not forget the time when he did of old appear to us—I mean for the first time. It must be more than six-and-thirty years since the Lord first appeared unto me, and I beheld him by the eye of faith. How vile was I in my own sight and how glorious was he in mine eyes! How my heart melted when I saw him bleeding on the tree for me! How all my passions burned and glowed with heavenly ardor as I understood that he loved me, and gave himself for me! Then his name, his word, his day, his people, were all precious in my sight. That was of old, but I do earnestly remember it still. It is very sweet to look back upon the time of our espousals, but it will become a bitter retrospect if we do not again and again behold our Lord. It is woe to have seen the sun if one is now shut up in a dark dungeon. O brothers, do not let us be satisfied with old appearances; let us cry to our Beloved, "O Lord, manifest thy-

self anew to me! O thou that hidest thyself, appear unto me! Look through the lattices, and let thy face be seen again!" He that condescended to show himself to you of old will again reveal his love. What Jesus has done he will still do. Once you walked by the way, and your heart burned within you because Jesus spake with you; he has said, "I will come again." Do you not recollect how, in the very pew in which you are now sitting, you felt as if you could hardly keep your seat, you wanted to cry "Hallelujah!" for joy of heart? Recall those happy periods, but only recall them with this resolve: "I will behold my Lord again. I will again delight myself in him." Do not let the text be the epitaph of a long-ago appearance; but let it be the dawning of a new day whose sun shall no more go down.

This appearance is ever an act of mighty grace. The text might he read, "The Lord appeared *from afar* to me." So he did at the first. What a great way off we were from God, but behold the Beloved came, like a roe or a young hart, leaping over the mountains, skipping upon the hills! He came to us in boundless love when we lay at death's dark door, the fast-bound slaves of hell. Brethren, he can and will come again. If he came to us from far, he will surely come again, now that he has made us nigh. Expect him to come to you on a sudden. While I am yet speaking, pray that, or ever you are aware, your soul may be like the chariots of Amminadib. Pray for the immediate revelation of God himself to your spirit in a way of joy and transport that shall set your soul in rapid motion towards the Lord. Should the Lord return to you in gracious manifestation, take care that you do not lose him again. If the bridegroom deigns to visit you,

hold him fast. If you once see the splendor of his love, do not close your eyes to it again, but gaze on till you behold him face to face in glory. Be this your prayer: "Abide with me." Be not satisfied till, like Enoch, you always walk with God. But to this end God must appear to his people.

II. Secondly, when the Lord does so appear, WE THEN PERCEIVE THAT HE HAS BEEN DEALING WITH US. "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: *therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.*" What exceeding love the Lord showed to us before we knew him! Let us now look back and remember the love of *longsuffering*, which spared us when we delighted in sin. The Lord did not cut us off in our unbelief; therein is love. Some read this text, "therefore in lovingkindness have I respited thee," or "therefore have I drawn out my lovingkindness unto thee," as if God stretched his lovingkindness while we were stretching out our sinfulness, and continued, year after year, to bear with us though we continued in wanton rebellion against him.

"Determined to save, he watched o'er my path
When, Satan's blind slave, I sported with death."

Think of sparing mercy now that you are able to see it because the Lord has appeared unto you.

The next admirable discovery is the Lord's *restraining grace*. We now see that the Lord held us back from plunging into the deepest abysses of sin. He would not let us commit crimes by which we might have ended our lives before conversion. He kept us back from sins which might have linked us in sad connections, and led us into such circumstances that we never might have been brought to hear his word, or

seek his face at all. Since the Lord has appeared to me, he has made me see his restraining hand where once I saw nothing but the cruel disappointment of my hopes. Blessed be God for those crooks in my lot which kept me from poisonous pleasures!

So, too, we now see the *preparations of grace*, the ploughing of our hearts by sorrow, the sowing of them by discipline, the harrowing of them by pain, the watering of them by the rain of favor, the breaking of them up by the frosts of adversity. These were not actually grace, but they opened the door for grace. We now see how in a thousand ways the Lord was drawing us when we knew him not.

The text chiefly dwells upon *drawings*. I beg you to refresh your memories by recollecting the drawings of the Lord towards you while you were yet ungodly. They began very early with some of us; even as little children we had great tenderness of conscience, and many movements of the Spirit which would not let us sin as others did. Often when we had done wrong, we went to our little beds, and cried ourselves to sleep under a sense of sin, a fear of punishment, and a longing for mercy. Those drawings were continuous with some of us: we can hardly remember when we were without holy impulses, though we did not yield to them. When we left the parental roof, those drawings followed us to our first situations. Do you recollect them? Before you knew the Lord Jesus, his holy Spirit strove with you. You went into great sin, some of you, but the Lord continued to follow you up. Even in your dreams he did not leave you. They were a way which the Lord had of getting at you; you hardened yourself against him when you were awake, but when you fell asleep he scared you

with visions, and made you think of judgment to come.

Often these were very gentle drawings: they were not such forces as would move an ox or an ass, but such as were meant for tender spirits; yet sometimes they tugged at you very hard, and almost overcame you. Drawing supposes a kind of resistance; or, at any rate, an inertness; and, truly, we did not stir of ourselves, but needed to be persuaded and entreated. Some of you will recollect how the Holy Spirit drew you many times before you came to him. Remember those thundering sermons which sent you home to your knees; those deep impressions which you could not shake off for a week or two; those depressions of spirit and horrors of darkness out of which you could not readily rise. The Lord surrounded you as a fish is surrounded with a net; and though you labored to escape you could not, but were drawn more and more within the meshes of mercy.

There are times with men, before conversion, when a sort of softness steals over them, when they feel as if they could not hold out much longer against appeals so reasonable and so gracious. A mother's prayers come up, perhaps her dying words are heard again; or the death of a little child touches the parent's heart as nothing else has done. The man is under holy influences, he knows not how; there are angels in the air around him, though there are devils in the heart within him. The man cannot be at peace in sin; he is restless till he finds rest in Jesus. It is the Lord drawing all the while: and after the Lord has appeared to us we see it to be so.

Do you remember when at last the Holy Spirit drew you over the line; when at last, without violating

your free will, he conquered it by forces proper to the mind? Blessed day! You were made a willing captive to your Lord, led in silken fetters at his chariot-wheels, a glad prisoner to almighty love, set free from sin and Satan, made to be unto your Lord a life-long servant. He drew you. You did not know much about it then, but you see it now.

After I had found grace and salvation a little time elapsed before I had surveyed the work of the Lord upon me; and when I did so, I learned much. Sitting down one day, I meditated upon where I was, and what I was. I said to myself, "I have believed in Jesus Christ, and I have passed from death unto life. To God be praise!" Then my train of thought ran thus: "How have I come to be in this condition? Did I make this change in myself? No. Must I praise my own free will? No. Was there originally in me some betterness which led me to Christ, while my companions have not come?" I dared not say so, and therefore I perceived that the difference was made by the sovereign grace of God. I do not know whereabouts in theology I might have wandered else, but those reflections made me a Calvinist, that is to say one who traces salvation to the Lord alone. I saw that my salvation was of the Lord from first to last, and I have never had a doubt about the matter since. It is no wish of mine to preach salvation by the will of man, or by the will of the flesh, but salvation all of grace, from beginning to end, according to the eternal purpose which the Lord purposed in Christ Jesus or ever the world was. It did not need any intricate reasoning to land me on the rock of free grace doctrine. If the Lord save me, then he intended to save me; he did not do so by accident or inadvertence. Then

if he once intended to save me, there could be no reason why that intention should begin at any one moment; he must have purposed to save me from all eternity. God has his plan and purpose, and what he actually does must have been known to him, and purposed by him, from of old. Then I saw, as in a glass, the ways of God towards me; but it was not till the Lord himself had appeared unto me that I had this conception of his ways. He himself, by his Spirit, expounded to me the whole system after this fashion: "I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." We understand the drawings of the Lord after we have seen the Lord himself, but not till then.

III. Then we proceed a step further, and WE PERCEIVE THAT LOVINGKINDNESS WAS THE DRAWING FORCE: "therefore *with lovingkindness* have I drawn thee." At first we think God has dealt sternly with us, but in his light we see light, and we perceive that the drawing power, which has brought us to receive mercy, is the divine lovingkindness. Love is the attractive force.

What multitudes of persons have been drawn to the Lord first by his lovingkindness in *the gift of his dear Son*. Perhaps there is no greater soul-saving text in the Bible than this, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." I must have conversed with more than a hundred persons who have found the Lord through this blessed verse. I am speaking very moderately, for I think I might say that I have known several hundreds who have been guided into liberty by this pole-star text. What a drawing there is in the fact that God gave his Son to redeem the guilty! Jesus died for the lost

world, and men believing in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. This is the master-magnet: "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." The lovingkindness of God as seen in the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, draws men from sin, from self, from Satan, from despair, and from the world.

Next, *the hope of pardon*, free and full, attracts sinners to God. "Thy sins, which are many, are all forgiven thee," makes a man run after Christ. Oh, what a draw there is in that word: "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, for he will have mercy upon him: and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon"! How one is drawn by the declaration, "all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men"! The blotting out of sin is a glorious phase of the divine lovingkindness, and many are allured by it to confess their sins. Is not the promise of remission the cord with which the Lord draws men to himself? "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Yes, there is such a thing as the entire blotting out of a life spent in iniquity. Jesus can wipe out the record of sin as a boy wipes the writing from his slate with a sponge. Sin is carried away by Jesus, even as the scapegoat bore away the sin of Israel. "They shall not be mentioned against thee any more for ever." "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins." Thus doth lovingkindness draw us.

I have known others drawn to the Lord by another view of his lovingkindness, namely, *his willingness to make new creatures of us*. The prayer of many has been,

“Create in me a clean heart, O God”; and they have been charmed by hearing that whosoever believes in Jesus is born again, to start on a new life, ruled by a new principle, and endowed with a new nature, sustained by the Holy Spirit. Many who desire purity of life and nature, and wish to be right with God, are won by the blessed prospect of being created anew in Christ Jesus.

It may seem somewhat strange to you, but that form of lovingkindness which mainly drew me to the Lord was this—I saw a good deal of the instability of character in young men who began life with bright prospects and fair promises, and I trembled for my own future. I read in the New Testament that he that believeth in Jesus hath everlasting life. I saw in the language of Christ himself these words—“I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hands.” Oh, how I longed to be one of these sheep, in the hands of Jesus! I had known schoolfellows who were held up as patterns to me, who acted very disappointingly after they left home; and I thought within myself: Oh, for a spiritual life insurance! Oh, for a way of putting my soul into secure keeping, so that I shall not become the prey of sin, but shall be kept by the grace of God even to the end! The belief that I should find this *permanence of grace* in Christ Jesus drew me more than anything else to Jesus. What a blessing to obtain “eternal salvation and good hope through grace”! What a favor to receive within the heart a well of living water, springing up into everlasting life! Let me live till my hair is all white with age, he will not suffer me to turn again unto folly; for it is written, “I will put my fear in their hearts, that

they shall not depart from me." I clutched at that promise from the beginning, and thus with loving-kindness the Lord drew me to himself. I see it now, and bless his name for using such a magnet.

Brethren, since we have known the Lord, has it not been his lovingkindness that has always drawn us? Can you tell me how much lovingkindness you have enjoyed? Begin the calculation. Yes, you may take out a paper and pencil if you like, and write away during the rest of my sermon; and when I have finished, I will ask you whether you have finished, and you will answer, "Sir, I have not quite begun yet." Oh, the lovingkindness of the Lord! You may measure heaven; you may fathom the sea; you may plunge into the abyss, and tell its depth; but the lovingkindness of the Lord is beyond you. Here is an infinite expanse. It is immeasurable, even as God himself is beyond conception. It is everywhere about us, behind, before, beneath, above, within, without. Every day the Lord loads us with benefits. He binds us with so many lovingkindnesses that he draws us now not with one cord, but with many, and each one draws omnipotently. His mercies are more than the hairs of our head: by day and by night he is drawing, drawing, drawing with those bands of love; and one of these days our whole body, soul, and spirit will so yield to the sweet compulsion of almighty love that the whole man will remove to be with him where he is, and still to feel his lovingkindness as we behold his glory. All this was always true, but we could not see it till the Lord appeared to us, and declared the gracious fact that with lovingkindness he had drawn us. The fact is precious, and the knowledge of it is exceedingly joyful.

IV. Lastly, I believe the appearing of the Lord to a man is the great means of teaching him divine truth. THEN WE LEARN THAT THE GREAT MOTIVE OF THE DIVINE DRAWINGS IS EVERLASTING LOVE. I do not want to preach any longer, but I want you to think. Description is not needed so much as meditation and realization. Think you hear the voice which with a word made heaven and earth! Think you hear it as a still small voice, whispering in your ear, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." Perhaps the less I talk about this the better, for words cannot express the inexpressible. Let your spirit lie asoak in this divine assurance—"I have loved thee with an everlasting love." Take it up into yourself as Gideon's fleece absorbed the dew.

Notice, the Lord *has done it*. It is an actual fact, the Lord is loving you. Put those two pronouns together, "*I*" and "*thee*" "*I*," the Infinite, the inconceivably glorious—"thee," a poor, lost, undeserving, ill-deserving, hell-deserving sinner. See the link between the two! See the diamond rivet which joins the two together for eternity: "*I have loved thee*." It is not, "*I have pitied thee*," nor "*I have thought about thee*," but "*I have loved thee*." God is in love with you. I think Aristotle said that it was impossible for one to be assured of another's love without feeling some love in return. I am not sure about that, but I think it is quite impossible to enjoy a sense of God's love without returning it in a measure. Soul, dost thou return it?

"I have loved thee." Not "*I will do so*," but "*I have loved thee*." Poor "*thee*"!—dost thou not reply, "Lord, if I might say it, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee. I cannot say that I love thee

even as thou lovest me, for I am such a feeble, finite creature; still I do love thee assuredly, and I dare say no other"? O beloved, what more can I add? The bare fact that the Lord loves us is heaven below if it be once thoroughly grasped by the soul.

See the antiquity of this love—"I have loved thee with an *everlasting* love." I loved thee when I died for thee upon the cross, yea, I loved thee long before, and therefore did I die. I loved thee when I made the heavens and the earth, with a view to thine abode therein: yea, I loved thee before I had made sea or shore. When this great world, the sun, the moon, and the stars slept in the mind of God, like unborn forests in an acorn cup, he loved his people. He saw them in the glass of futurity with prescient eye, ages before ages had begun, and then he loved them with an everlasting love. There is a beginning for the world, but there is no beginning for the love of God to his people.

Nor does that exhaust the meaning of "everlasting love." There has never been a moment when the Lord has not loved his people. There has been no pause, no ebb, nor break in the love of God to his own. That love knows no variableness, neither shadow of turning. When we were babes, and could not know him, he loved us. When we were foolish youths, running riot in iniquity, he loved us. When we became men, hard and callous, resisting divine grace, he drew us, though we did not run after him; for he loved us then. He loves us this day as much as ever, even though he may be chastening us. His love is a river, ever flowing and overflowing: it will never diminish, and it cannot increase, for it is infinite already.

“ Mine is an unchanging love,
Higher than the heights above ;
Deeper than the depths beneath,
Free and faithful, strong as death.”

“ I have loved thee with an everlasting love.” You may take a leap into the future, and find that love still with you. Everlasting evidently lasts for ever. Certain divines have tried to cut the heart out of that word “ everlasting,” and to make it out that it means a terminable period, but it is idle to argue with men to whom words are mere shuttlecocks to play with. Most plainly that which is everlasting lasts for ever. You and I may live till we grow old and decrepit, but the Lord will not leave us, for it is written, “ I have loved thee with an everlasting love.” We shall come to die, and this shall be a downy pillow for our death-bed, “ I have loved thee with an everlasting love.” When we wake up in that dread world to which we are surely hastening, we shall find infinite felicity in “ everlasting love.” When the judgment is proclaimed, and the sight of the great white throne makes all hearts to tremble, and the trumpet sounds exceeding loud and long, and our poor dust wakes up from its silent grave, we shall rejoice in this divine assurance: “ I have loved thee with an everlasting love.” Roll on, ye ages, but everlasting love abides ! Die out, sun and moon, and thou, O time, be buried in eternity, we need no other heaven than this, “ I have loved thee with an everlasting love” ! Brethren, the Lord’s appearing unto us has taught us great things in teaching us everlasting love.

I want the child of God to receive this assurance thoroughly into his soul, that God loves him with an everlasting love. Why, it makes my pulses beat

more quickly: it makes me so full of delight that I can scarcely contain myself! A divine delight thrills me. I, a poor sinner, even I, am the object of everlasting love. What then? Why, I must love my Lord. How can I help it? Do you not feel that you must wake up, from this time forth, to serve your loving Lord at a sevenfold pace? Will you not consecrate yourselves to him, to spend and to be spent for him? What is there too precious to lay at his feet? Out with your alabaster box now, if ever in your lives! What is there too heavy for you to bear? What is there too hard for you to undertake for one who has loved you so faithfully, without beginning, without change, without measure, without end?

Alas for you, poor heart, to whom this text does not belong! There stands the golden chalice. Oh, that you were athirst, for then you might drink of it! You have not seen the Lord, for you have not sought him. You know not that you are drawn, for you have never come to Christ, nor have you believed in his great sacrifice. If there were no hell hereafter, it would be hell enough to me not to enjoy everlasting love. I count that man a wretch undone who has never heard the sweet, full music of this text. What! Do you live without God? Do you despise his love? If there were no hereafter, it is unhappiness enough to be lost to the infinite delight of knowing the love of God. Oh, that you would now believe in Jesus, and find peace through his blood!

But O you that have this cup of blessing, drink of it to the full! Live upon this assurance! Go away singing because of it! Let not trouble disturb you—why should it? Let nothing vex you—why should it? Let no ill deed done to you by another provoke

you: be ready to forgive because you see that the Lord has loved you, and therefore you can love the most unlovable. None are too vile to share in our love, since God has loved us. My heart sings, "He loved me, and gave himself for me," and I am now prepared to love my enemies, if I have any.

O Lord, appear to each one of us now! Appear to us, and say, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." Grant it, for thy sweet love's sake! Amen.

XIII.

IN CHRIST NO CONDEMNATION.

August 29, 1886.

“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”
—ROMANS viii. 1.

YOU are well aware, dear friends, that the division into chapters has only been made for convenience' sake, and is not a matter of inspired arrangement. I may add that it has been clumsily made, and not with careful thoughtfulness, but as roughly as if a woodman had taken an axe and chopped the book to pieces in a hurry. It was a very unfortunate thing that the axe dropped down just here, so as to divide a passage which ought to have been kept entire. We once heard a friend say, “I have got out of the seventh of Romans into the eighth.” Nonsense! There is no getting out of one into the other, for they are one. The field is not divided by hedge or ditch. I thank God with all my heart that since my conversion I have never known what it is to be out of the seventh of Romans, nor out of the eighth of Romans either: the whole passage has been solid truth to my experience. I have struggled against inward sin, and rejoiced in complete justification at the same time.

Our apostle, after having said, “So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God: but with the flesh the law of sin,” goes on to say, without any break, “There is therefore now no condemnation to

them which are in Christ Jesus." The fact is, that believers are in a state of conflict, but not in a state of condemnation; and that at the very time when the conflict is hottest the believer is still justified. When the believer has to do his utmost even to hold his ground, when he feels that he cannot advance an inch without fighting for it, when he has to cry out in the agony of his spirit because of the vehemence of temptation, he may still lay his hand upon the word of God, and say, "And yet there is no condemnation to me, for I am in Christ Jesus." The man who never strives against the sin which dwelleth in him, who indeed is not conscious of any sin to strive against, that is the man who may begin to question whether he knows anything at all about the spiritual life. He who has no inward pain may well suspect that he is abiding in death, abiding therefore under constant condemnation; but that man who feels a daily striving after deliverance from evil, who is panting, and pining, and longing, and agonizing to become holy even as God is holy, he is the justified man. The man to whom every sin is a misery, to whom even the thought of iniquity is intolerable, he is the man who may with confidence declare, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." Souls that sigh for holiness are not condemned to eternal death, for their sighing proves that they are in Christ Jesus.

Observe that the text is written in the present tense. You will lose much of its force and beauty if you leave out that word "now," or regard it as a mere term of argument. This "now" shows how distinctly the statement of non-condemnation is consistent with that mingled experience of the seventh chapter, which certain good people do not appear to understand. The

passage describes a conflict which the unregenerate cannot feel; for they neither delight in God after the inward man, nor do they agonize to be set free from the presence of sin. Every child of God must know this conflict if he knows himself. If it had not been for the fierce debates of former ages this passage would have been accepted as an accurate picture of the inner life of the struggling believer; and it would have been held up to admiration as a sure proof of the divine inspiration of the epistle, that with such singular accuracy it records the secret experience of a soul struggling after purity, an experience which often puzzles the very people who are the subjects of it. Reading my text in that connection, with an emphasis upon the "now," my heart sings for joy. With all my watching, and warring—yea, with all my fears and tremblings—yet will I rejoice in the Lord even now; for "there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus."

I would have you carefully observe our apostle's change of expression. When he is speaking about the inward contention he writes in the first person, and speaks of himself: "I find then a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me." That which might seem humiliating and derogatory he imputes to himself most distinctly, crying out, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" But when he comes to write upon the privileges of the children of God, he does not write in the first person, but he speaks of *them* in general terms:—"There is therefore now no condemnation to *them* which are in Christ Jesus." His deep humility thus displayed itself. His very self-remembrance is a self-annihilation: he uses himself as lead

wherewith to sink his nets, but his brethren he puts into the place of honor and esteem. His is the confession, and theirs is the confidence: he extols the glorious company of believers, but he lowers himself. This is the style of his language; and the style often reveals the man. He might have said, "There is therefore now no condemnation to me, for I am in Christ Jesus," and it would have been true; but it would not have been after the manner of the lowly apostle.

After these wanderings upon the shores of the text, let us now plunge into its depths; and may the Holy Spirit from whom it proceeded bless it to our hearts!

I. I would say, first of all, that this verse contains A REFUTATION OF THE OLD SERPENT'S GOSPEL. "The serpent's gospel," say you, "what is that?" It is another name for the gospel of modern thought,—that gospel which casts a doubt upon the threatenings of the law, and even denies them altogether. Quote the first few words of the text, and stop there, and this false gospel is before you—"There is therefore now no condemnation." The serpent promulgated this gospel in the Garden of Eden when he said, "Ye shall not surely die." With what greediness our first parents received that highly advanced teaching which contradicted the declaration of God—"Thou shalt surely die!" The doctrine of no punishment for any man is popular at this day, and threatens to have even greater sway in the future. Generally it comes in the serpent's favorite form of "honest doubt."—"Yea, hath God said?" Can it be so? Is he not far too merciful? Is it possible that a God of love should condemn and punish his creatures?

The denial of the penalty attached to sin comes out

in different ways, but when put into a nutshell it amounts to this—"There is therefore now no condemnation to any man, however he may live." Some teach that you may live in sin, and die impenitent, but it will not matter, for at death there is an end of you; the soul is not immortal, men are only cooking animals. Others tell us that if you die unforgiven it will be a pity, but you will come round in due time, after a purgatorial period: you may take a little longer road, but you will come to the same end in the course of time. In fine, it does not matter how you live, or what you do, you will become perfectly happy in the long run; therefore trouble not yourselves with the exploded notion that there is a heaven to be lost or a hell to be feared. The wrath of God and the judgment to come are mere bugbears, according to the teaching of our new apostles. This is the gospel according to Satan; a gospel which has already ruined thousands of souls, and is now sealing up myriads in a stony-hearted unbelief which enables them to sin without fear. Though these evil doctrines have done incalculable mischief in many places so as almost to paralyze the energies of the church, yet some professed Christians, boastful of their "culture," would move heaven and earth to spread these delusions.

Here is Paul's refutation of this doctrine of a general amnesty—"There is therefore *now* no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." They would be condemned, every one of them, if it had not been that they are in Christ Jesus; and there is *now* no condemnation to them, solely because they are in Christ Jesus. Their being in Christ Jesus is the great method by which alone they have escaped condemnation. If Paul had only stopped when he had got as far as "there is

now no condemnation," every drunkard and swearer and whoremonger would have cried, "Bravo, apostle, that is the gospel for us! Now you speak like a man of thought. You have broken loose from the horrible old doctrine of Jesus of Nazareth, and have found for us a 'larger hope.' Hurrah for Paul! He is in advance of his age; he is the man for the times!" But Paul was too honest to court popularity by pandering to man's desire of immunity in sin. He believed the terrible truth that the impenitent sinner is under condemnation, and believing that truth, he spoke it plainly. He did not deal out comfort hand over head, catch it who can; but he put it thus—"There is therefore now no condemnation *to them which are in Christ Jesus.*"

It is a work of almighty and sovereign grace, to put men into Christ Jesus; by this method they escape condemnation, but by no other. I understand Paul tacitly to tell us that those who are not in Christ Jesus are under condemnation; and this is a terrible truth. "He that believeth not shall be damned" is as much the declaration of our Lord Jesus as that other divine sentence, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." As many as believe not in Christ Jesus, and repent not of sin, have before them at this moment "a fearful looking for of judgment and of fiery indignation."

It is no pleasant task to us to have to speak of this matter; but who are we that we should ask for pleasant tasks? What God hath witnessed in Scripture is the sum and substance of what the Lord's servants are to testify to the people. If you are not in Christ Jesus, and are walking after the flesh, you have not escaped from condemnation.

One alarming fact I must not fail to mention here—the word “now” is as applicable to these condemned ones as to those who are freed from condemnation. It would be true if I were to say, “There is therefore *now* condemnation to all them that are not in Christ Jesus.” Hear these words, they are the words of John the tender, who leaned his head on the gentle bosom of his Master:—“He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed upon the Son of God.” We are said by common talk to be in a state of *probation*, but that is not true; we are all of us in a state of present condemnation, if we are not in Christ Jesus. If you felt the true force of words some of you would start from off your seats at the sound of that sentence: “He that believeth not is condemned already.” The sentence has gone out against you if you have not believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. “*Condemned already.*” Think of it, I pray you. You have made God a liar because you have not believed his testimony concerning his Son; and he, on the other hand, has already judged you and condemned you; and this is the most conclusive of all evidence as to the blackness of your hearts, that you have not believed upon the Son of God. There is condemnation for unbelievers, and that condemnation is now.

I must also add that to as many as believe not in the Lord Jesus Christ, who walk after the flesh and not after the Spirit, there is nothing but condemnation so long as they remain in that state. It is written, “He that believeth not shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.” That is a terrible text. It is not as though wrath flashed upon you now and then, with the glare of momentary lightning; but a black cloud charged with destruction and tempest

continues over your guilty heads till you fly away to Christ. O sirs, I *must* tell you these things. It is as much as my soul is worth to be silent about them. If you think that I find any pleasure in them you misjudge me. I appeal to those who know me—am I morose? Am I without tenderness? No, it is because I love you that I warn you. You shall not perish through any flattering words of mine. I will be clear of your blood. It is idle for me to sew without a needle. There are many new sewing-machines, but none that can dispense with the needle. You cannot take silk and sew with that alone; you must have a sharp needle to pierce the fabric, so that the soft silk may follow afterwards. These words of warning are meant to be my needle. May God the Holy Ghost use them as such—to go right through your hearts with the sharp prick of conviction, and so prepare you for the thread of the gospel! “There is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus;” but if sin is not forgiven, you are under its condemnation; and if you die in your sins, you will die for ever that death which brings with it everlasting woe. If you are not reconciled to God by the death of his Son, you are his enemies, and to be at enmity with God is to be miserable; it cannot be otherwise. How I wish you would feel this truth, and be led by it to escape from the wrath to come before yonder sun shall again go down! God grant you may. I entreat those of you who know the Lord to pray at this moment silently in your hearts that God will arouse the careless, so that under a sense of well-deserved condemnation they may fly to Jesus, and be reconciled to God.

So much for Paul's refutation of the serpent's gospel.

II. And now, secondly, we have in the text A DESCRIPTION OF THE BELIEVER'S POSITION—*he is "in Christ Jesus."* What does that mean?

I am not going into any deep theological disquisitions; I speak very simply and with a view to practical results. He that believes in the Lord Jesus Christ is in Christ. *By an act of simple dependence upon Jesus he realizes his position as being in Christ.* By nature I am in myself, and in sin, and I am, therefore, condemned; but when the grace of God awakens me up to know my ruined state, then I fly to Christ. I trust alone in his blood and righteousness, and he becomes to me the cleft of the rock, wherein I hide myself from the storm of vengeance justly due to me for my many offences. The Lord Jesus is typified by the city of refuge. You and I are like the manslayer who was pursued by the avenger; and we are never safe till we pass the gate of the city of refuge—I mean, till we are completely enclosed by the Lord Jesus. Inside the walls of the city the manslayer was secure, and within our Saviour's wounds we are safe. By a humble, simple, undivided dependence upon him we are placed where we are covered by his merits, and so saved. Noah's dove out yonder, flying over the waste of waters, is outside the ark; she will never rest the sole of her foot till Noah puts out his hand and pulls her in unto him: then is she secure, and restful; but not till then. Judge, then, my hearer, whether you are in Christ. Do you stand before God on your own footing, or do you rest upon Christ, and find your all in him? This is not an abstruse problem, but a plain question. Say, is your righteousness one which you have wrought out yourself, or is the righteousness of Christ imputed to you? Do you look for salvation by

self, or for salvation by Christ? If you can truly say, "I hide in Christ," then this text warbles sweeter music than ever fell from angel lips—"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." Inasmuch as you have believed in him, you are in him. "He that believeth on him hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation": these are our Lord's own dear words; treasure them up in your spirits, and rejoice in them for evermore.

Let us go a little deeper. That which faith thus realizes by coming unto Christ for shelter was true before, in a blessed sense. I understand my text, when it says "*therefore*," to refer to all that the apostle had argued before in the previous part of his epistle; but even if I did not think so, I could understand his *therefore*, for I believe that the text carries its own argument within itself. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." Why "therefore"? Because they are in Christ Jesus. Therefore there is no condemnation to them because they are in him who can never be condemned. Though it is quite correct to fetch your argument from the preceding part of the epistle, yet it seems to me it is a self-contained verse, and carries its argument within itself. If you are in Christ, there is for that very reason no condemnation to you.

Still, there are other arguments near at hand. Will you at home kindly read the fifth chapter, and you will perceive that believers are in Christ *as their federal head*. By one transgression Adam introduced death into the race, "and so death passed upon all men, for that all had sinned"; but Jesus came to bring life by his obedience. "As by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation;

even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life." By Christ's righteous life and substitutionary death, justification has come upon all who are in him. As you were in Adam you sinned, and therefore you fell, and were condemned; and as you were in Christ through the divine covenant of grace, and Christ fulfilled the law for you, you are justified in him. His righteousness and sacrifice have availed for you: "There is therefore now no condemnation." Because we are viewed by divine justice as under the headship of the perfect Man, who, on our behalf, has magnified the law and made it honorable, therefore are we well pleasing unto God. We are accepted in the Beloved. It is written, "By the obedience of one shall many be made righteous"; and we enjoy the fulfilment of that promise. Will the Lord condemn those whom he has made righteous? Will he do despite to the righteousness of his own Son wherewith we are covered?

But Paul goes on to show in the sixth chapter that the saints of God are united to Christ *by a living and vital union*. He says of us, "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection." We are actually one with Christ by living experience. Beloved, if it be so, that we died in Christ, then we shall not be put to death again for the sin for which we have already died in him. If we have received a new life in Christ's resurrection, then that promise is true, "Because I live, ye shall live also"; and for that reason we cannot be condemn-

ed, for condemnation involves death. We, beloved, who are in Christ, are justified because Christ is justified by his rising from the dead, and by his taking the position of honor and glory at the right hand of God. He is our representative, and we are one with him, and what he is that are we. Our union is inseparable, and therefore our condemnation is impossible.

In the seventh chapter the apostle mentions our *mystical union* with Christ under the figure of a marriage union:—"Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God." Shall the spouse of Christ be condemned with the world? "Christ loved his church, and gave himself for it"; shall she be condemned despite his death? This union with Christ is often mentioned in Scripture under the form of a marriage, but it is also described under other symbols: we are one with Christ as a branch is one with the vine, as a stone is one with the foundation, and especially as a member of the body is one with the head. Now it is not possible if I am a member of Christ that I should be under condemnation until he is condemned. Is my head acquitted? Then my hand is acquitted. So long as a man's head is above water you cannot drown his feet; and as long as Christ, the Head of the mystical body, rises above the torrent of condemnation, there is no condemning even the least and feeblest member of his body.

It has been my joy to preach to you for many years the blessed doctrine of *substitution*. Now, if Jesus became our Surety and our Substitute, and suffered in our stead, it is an inevitable consequence that we can-

not suffer punishment, and that the sin laid upon our surety cannot now be laid upon us. If our debt was paid, it was paid and there is an end of it; a second payment cannot be demanded. You know the story, the very excellent story, which I think was first told by Mr. Moody, of the man who in the French war was drawn for a soldier, but a friend stepped in, and was accepted as his substitute. That substitute served in the war till he was slain in battle. The man for whom he served was drawn a second time, but he declined to serve. He appeared before the court, and pleaded that he had been drawn once, had served in the war by his substitute, and must now be regarded as dead, because his representative had been killed. He pleaded that his substitute's service was practically his service, and it is said that the law allowed his plea. Assuredly it is according to divine equity, even if it be not according to human law. No criminal can be hanged a second time; one death is all the law requires: believers died in Christ unto sin once, and now they penally die no more. Our condemnation has spent itself upon our gracious representative. The full vials of divine wrath against sin have been poured upon the head of the great Shepherd, that his sheep might go free; and therein is our joy, our comfort, our security. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." Bow your heads in worship, ye that are in him. Render an ascription of blessing and praise and glory unto him who took you unto himself, and then bore your sins in his own body on the tree, so that you might be delivered from condemnation through his sufferings and death.

Thus, by faith, we are in Christ Jesus, and the assurance of our safety is enlarged by a consideration of

his federal headship, our vital oneness with him, our mystical marriage to him, and his finished work on our behalf.

III. Now we come to the third point, upon which we shall speak briefly, because this part of my text is not a true portion of Holy Scripture. We have before us in this verse A DESCRIPTION OF THE BELIEVER'S WALK,—*“who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”* You who have the Revised New Testament will kindly look at it. Do you see this sentence there? To your surprise it is omitted, and very rightly so. The most learned men assure us that it is no part of the original text. I cannot just now go into the reasons for this conclusion, but they are very good and solid. The oldest copies are without it, the versions do not sustain it, and the fathers, who quoted abundance of Scripture, do not quote this sentence. We must admit that it is a gloss inserted in later copies by some penman, who was wise enough in his own conceit to think that he could mend the Bible.

Do you ask me, “How did it get into the text?” Remember that there always have been many divines who have been afraid of the doctrine of free justification. They have been half afraid that sinners should get comfort by faith, and should not see the necessity of a change of life. They have questioned the wisdom of ascribing salvation wholly to a man's being in Christ, and so they have guarded the more open passages whenever they have seen a chance of so doing. In so doing they stated truth, but they stated it out of season, and from motives which were unsound. Probably the sentence now before us was put in, and allowed to remain, by general consent, in order that the great truth of the

non-condemnation of those who are in Christ Jesus might be guarded from that Antinomian tendency which would separate faith from good works. But the fear was groundless, and the tampering with Scripture was unjustifiable. We are greatly obliged to our revisers for leaving out the sentence, since it should not be there, and without it the doctrine of justification in Christ is made more clear than in the Authorized Version. In the last chapter of the Book of Revelation, service of the same kind is most properly rendered; for instead of "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life," the Revisers have given us a more accurate text: "Blessed are they that wash their robes." In these two cases we have proof that the more nearly the text of Scripture is restored to its original purity, the more clearly will the doctrines of grace be set forth in it. The more we get back to true Scripture, the more shall we escape all interference with the complete and perfect salvation which comes of our being in Christ. We are not justified by the manner of our walk, but by our being in Christ Jesus.

Again, you ask me, "Where did the man who made the gloss get his words from? The words are so good and true that they read like inspiration." Just so. The words are borrowed from the fourth verse. The Holy Ghost meant to say this very thing a little further on, in its proper place; but the good men who felt it right to tamper a little with the document must needs make him say it sooner, and therefore they copied the last sentence of the fourth verse and placed it here:—"who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Truly, there was not much hurt done, for the words are true; but no man has a right

to add to holy Scripture or take from it, and I fear that many may have been brought into needless bondage by this sentence being inserted where the Holy Spirit did not place it. Beloved, when you desire to know your state, be content with this question—"Am I in Christ?" and if you can answer it from your heart, let it suffice you: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." Others may better judge your walk than you can judge it yourself; but your union with Christ is best known to yourself.

Still, the interpolated sentence is true; the man who is in Christ Jesus does not walk after the flesh, but after the spirit. Suppose me to be now preaching upon verse four.

We notice that such a man in Christ has received the Holy Ghost, for he walks according to his guidance. All honor and worship be unto the third most blessed Person of the Divine Trinity, that he should deign to dwell in our poor hearts and sanctify our spirits to himself. Every believer has the Holy Ghost.

Secondly, every believer has been quickened into the possession of a new nature called *the spirit*. He has a right spirit within him, a new spirit, a holy spirit—the spirit of life in Christ Jesus. He is a new creature: he is no longer in the flesh, but in the spirit, and so he has become a spiritual man.

Observe carefully that the flesh is there: he does not walk after it, but it is there. It is there, striving and warring, vexing and grieving, and it will be there till he is taken up into heaven. It is there as an alien and detested force, and not there so as to have dominion over him. He does not walk after it, nor practically obey it. He does not accept it as his guide, nor allow

it to drive him into rebellion. The man who is in Christ Jesus commits himself to the guidance of the Holy Ghost.

What a wonderful power is that which dwells in every believer, checking him when he would do wrong, encouraging him to do right, leading him in the paths of righteousness for Christ's name's sake! Happy men to have such a Conductor!

Judge ye yourselves in which way ye are walking. Are you walking according to the flesh? Do you do whatever you like to do? Do you believe whatever you like to believe? Do you say to yourself, "I am not going to be limited by Scripture, nor by rules of holiness: these are too old-fashioned and strait-laced for me"? Then, you walk after the flesh: you are your own guide: your own wisdom and righteousness and vain desires conduct you whither they will. You are blind, and your guide is blind, and you will soon fall into the ditch. You think not so, but time will prove my words.

Blessed is that man who no longer follows the devices and desires of his own heart, and no longer trusts to his own understanding. Blessed is he who bows his mind to the mind of God. My own desire is not to believe what I may imagine, or invent, or think out; but I would believe what the Lord God has taught us in the inspired Scriptures. I submit myself to the guidance of the Spirit of God in connection with the written word. This is safe walking.

Combine the two descriptive clauses of my text. On the one hand look to Christ alone, and abide in him; and then, on the other hand, look for the guidance of the Holy Spirit who is to be in you. By faith we are in Christ, and the Holy Spirit is in us. All

who can go with me in this are delivered from condemnation: for how shall he be condemned that is in Christ? And how shall he be condemned that hath the Holy Ghost within him? "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

IV. And so I come, in closing, to notice THE ABSOLUTION OF THE BELIEVER: "There is therefore now *no condemnation* to them which are in Christ Jesus." What a grand sentence! I call upon you to notice it. You may have seen a well-painted picture called "Waiting for the Verdict." What interest is displayed on every face! What fear and trembling upon the countenance of the prisoner! In his wife and the friends around him, what anxiety is seen! "Waiting for the Verdict" is a sad picture; but what another might be drawn of The Favorable Verdict Received. The prisoner is acquitted! O what joy! It is not possible to bring in a verdict of "Not Guilty" for you and for me, for we are undoubtedly guilty; but yet it is possible by the process of substitution and divine grace to bring in a just verdict by which it is witnessed that "There is now no condemnation."

Notice, first, that this is *a bold speech*. "There is no condemnation." "But you said just now that the thing you would not that you did." Yes, but there is no condemnation. The same lips which made such a humble confession and revealed such a troublesome experience, now assert positively and joyfully "There is no condemnation." Free grace makes men speak bravely when their faith has a clear view of Jesus.

Though it is a bold assertion, *it is proven*. Whenever a man has a "therefore" at the back of what

he has to say, he may say it without stammering. "There is *therefore* now no condemnation." Paul is always a reasoner and a great logician. Here he seems to declare his certainty. "What I say I can prove. There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, and I can prove it to a demonstration." Brethren, the demonstrations of mathematics are not more clear and certain than the inference that if we are in Christ, and Christ died in our stead, there can be no condemnation for us. Cool calculation may be used here. This is no raving of fanaticism, but the unquestionable deduction of fair argument:—if Jesus was condemned in my stead, there can be no condemnation for me.

What a *broad assertion* it is!—"There is *no* condemnation."—No condemnation on account of original sin, though the believer was an heir of wrath even as others. No condemnation for actual sin, though he greatly transgressed and came far short of the glory of God. He is in Christ, and there is no condemnation of any sort possible to him. No condemnation, no, though he humbles himself and weeps and groans before God because in thought and word and deed he still offends. No condemnation, though he feels that he has not yet attained to the excellence which he labors after.

The devil says there is condemnation, and therefore he accuses us day and night. He was a liar from the beginning, and the father of lies! Conscience sometimes censures us, for even conscience itself needs to be enlightened and to be purged from dead works; but when conscience understands the plan of free grace, and sees things in the light of truth, it also bears witness, and the spirit of God bears witness with

it, that we are the children of God. "No," saith the apostle, "there is no condemnation." What a broad sweep these words take! If you read to the end of the chapter you see how unreserved Paul was in his statement; for there he mounts the high horse, and cries, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again." Paul makes all heaven and earth and hell to ring with his daring challenge, "Who is he that condemneth?" In the broadest imaginable terms he declares that there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. Where there is no condemnation there is no wrath, no guilt, no punishment. On the contrary, there is acceptance, favor, and bliss.

This, beloved, is *an abiding statement*, a standing assertion. It was true of me thirty years ago as a believer, and it is just as true of me now. It was true in Paul's day, and though centuries have passed away, it is just as true at this moment. If you are in Christ Jesus there is *now* no condemnation. That living *now* goes singing down the centuries: in life, in death, in time, in eternity, there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.

What a *joyful statement* it is! It makes one laugh for joy of heart. If you have ever been burdened with a sense of sin you will know the sweetness of the text. You that are not sinners, you good respectable people who are sailing to heaven in your own ship, there is nothing in it for you. Gospel assurances are not for you: you would not prize them, and therefore you have neither part nor lot in them. For Jesus Christ came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. But you that have been whipped of the devil

and dragged at the heels of your sins, you that have been broken and crushed as in a mortar, with a pestle, till you are ground fine under the hand of conviction, you are the people that will leap for joy as you hear the silver trumpet ring out the note of "no condemnation." Come, let us be glad. Let us rejoice together because there is now no condemnation to us. When Giant Despair's head was cut off, Mr. Bunyan says that the pilgrims danced; and well they might. Mr. Despondency and Miss Much-afraid took a turn, and even Ready-to-Halt with his crutches must needs join in. I warrant you he footed it well. When he saw the monster's head upon the pole he could not help being merry. This text sticks the giant's head up on the pole for us. "There is therefore now no condemnation." Oh for the loud-sounding cymbals! Now for the maidens and their timbrels. Let us have holy merriment over this. Poor prodigal sinners have fled to Jesus and hidden in him, and there is now no condemnation to them. Poverty? Yes, but no condemnation. Depression of spirit? Yes, sometimes; but no condemnation. Infirmities and weaknesses, and things to grieve over? Yes, plenty of them, but no condemnation. "O come, let us sing unto the Lord: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!"

"All very well," says one, "but we should like something practical." Practical! this is *the most practical thing that ever was*, because the moment a man receives this assurance into his soul his heart is won to his loving Lord, and the neck of his sinfulness is broken with a blow. There never was, ay, never can be, a man that has realized by the witness of the Holy Ghost that he is free from condemnation who will ever go to love sin and live in it. While

I am condemned, I say, "Well, if I am to be sent to hell for my sin, I may as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb, and therefore I will continue in sin, and get what pleasure I can out of it." Do you not know how the guilty man often feels, that since there is no hope for him, he may as well harden his heart, and enjoy himself? A mouse was caught in a trap, the other day, by its tail, and the poor creature went on eating the cheese. Many men are doing the same; they know that they are guilty, and they dread their punishment, but they go on nibbling at their beloved sins. They remind me of the soldier in the old classic story. The army marched through a certain country, and the commander-in-chief ordered that there should be no plundering; not a man must touch a bunch of grapes in going through the vineyards, or he should die for his disobedience. One soldier, tempted by a bunch of grapes, must needs pluck it, and begin to eat it. He was brought before the captain, who declared that the law must be carried out and the thief must die. He was taken out to die; and though he knew his head would be cut off, he went on eating the grapes as he walked along. A comrade wondered that he should do this; but the condemned man answered that no one ought to grudge him his grapes, for they cost him dear enough.

Such are the bravados of sinners. The breasts of wicked men are steeled rather than softened by a sense of condemnation; but once let the Holy Spirit remove the burden of their guilt, and they will be dissolved by love. Free pardon is a great conqueror. The love of Jesus soon makes men turn from sin with burning hatred. Forgiving love is a main instrument in transforming men from rebels into friends. You

may preach the demands of the law as long as you like, and tell men that they must merit salvation, and you will only make them worse and worse. But go and proclaim the dying love of Jesus: tell them that free grace reigns, and that undeserved mercy saves the sinner through faith in Christ, and that the moment he believes in Jesus there is no condemnation to him, and you shall see miracles accomplished. In the experience of free grace you have something to work upon: you have put a new affection into the man, and it will drive out his base affections. A life force is communicated to him which will cause him to forsake his old ways and turn unto the Lord. "How do you know?" says one. I know by experience and by observation. I could point you out many specimens of the power of divine grace in this assembly, but I will not do so. If I were to say, "Brothers and sisters, you who once lived in sin but have escaped from it through free grace and dying love, stand up!" what an exceeding great army would start to their feet! Yes, we know it is true, for the lips of many witnesses declare it: they say, "Jesus saved us from the worst of sins, and made us his friends by his free grace, and now we rejoice to love and serve him." So shall it be with you, dear hearer, if you also believe in Jesus. The text shall be true of you also—"There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." God bless you! Amen.

XIV.

CONCERNING DEATH.

September 26, 1886.

“For I know that thou wilt bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living.”—JOB xxx. 23.

JOB suffered from a terrible sickness, which filled him with pain both day and night. It is supposed that, in addition to his grievous eruptions upon the skin, he endured great difficulty in breathing. He says in the eighteenth verse, “By the great force of my disease is my garment changed: it bindeth me about as the collar of my coat.” His clothes were sodden, and clung to him; his skin was blackened, and seemed to be tightened. He was like a man whose tunic strangles him: the collar of his garment seemed to be fast bound about his throat. Those who have suffered from it know what distress is occasioned by this complaint, especially when they are also compelled to cry, “My bones are pierced in me in the night season: and my sinews take no rest.” At such a time Job thought of death, and surely if at any period in our lives we should consider our latter end, it is when the frail tent of our body begins to tremble, because the cords are loosened and the curtain is rent. It is the general custom with sick people to talk about “getting well”; and those who visit them, even when they are gracious people, will see the tokens of death upon them and yet will speak as if they were hopeful of their recovery.

I remember a father asking me when I prayed with a consumptive girl to be sure not to mention death. In such cases it would be far more sensible for the sick man to turn his thoughts towards eternity, and stand prepared for the great change. When our God by our affliction calls upon us to number our days, let us not refuse to do so. I admire the wisdom of Job, that he does not shirk the subject of death, but dwells upon it as an appropriate topic, saying, "I know that thou wilt bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living."

Yet Job made a mistake in the hasty conclusion which he drew from his grievous affliction. Under depression of spirit he felt sure that he must very soon die; he feared that God would not relax the blows of his hand until his body became a ruin, and then he would have rest. But he did not die at that time. He was fully recovered, and God gave him twice as much as he had before. A life of usefulness, and happiness, and honor lay before him; and yet he had set up his own tombstone, and reckoned himself a dead man. It is a pity for us to pretend to predict the future, for we certainly cannot see an inch before us. As it is idle with day-dreams to fascinate the heart into a groundless expectation, so it is equally foolish to increase the evil of the day by forebodings of to-morrow. Who knoweth what is to be? Wherefore should I wish to uplift the corner of the curtain, and peer into what God has hidden? Some of those who have been most sure that they would die soon, have lived longer than others. A prophet once prayed to die, and yet he never saw death. From the lips of Elias, who was to be caught up by a whirlwind into heaven, it was a strange

prayer—"Take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers."

It is the part of a brave man, and especially of a believing man, neither to dread death nor to sigh for it; neither to fear it nor to court it. In patience possessing his soul, he should not despair of life when hardly pressed; and he should be always more eager to run his race well than to reach its end. It is no work of men of faith to predict their own deaths. These things are with God. How long we shall live on earth we know not, and need not wish to know. We have not the choosing of short or long life; and if we had such choice, it would be wise to refer it back to our God. "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit," is an admirable prayer for living as well as for dying saints. To wish to pry between the folded leaves of the book of destiny is to desire a questionable privilege; doubtless we live the better because we cannot foresee the moment when this life shall reach its *finis*.

Job made a mistake as to the date of his death, but he made no mistake as to the fact itself. He spake truly when he said: "I know that thou wilt bring me to death." Some day or other the Lord will call us from our home above ground to the house appointed for all living. I invite you this morning to consider this unquestioned truth. Do you start back? Why do you do so? Is it not greatly wise to talk with our last hours? "We want a cheerful theme." Do you? Is not this a cheerful theme to you? It is solemn, but it ought also to be welcome to you. You say that you cannot abide the thought of death. Then you greatly need it. Your shrinking from it proves that you are not in a right state of mind, or else you would take it into due consideration without reluctance.

That is a poor happiness which overlooks the most important of facts. I would not endure a peace which could only be maintained by thoughtlessness. You have something yet to learn if you are a Christian, and yet are not prepared to die. You need to reach a higher state of grace, and attain to a firmer and more forceful faith. That you are as yet a babe in grace, is clear from your admission that to depart and be with Christ does not seem to be a better thing for you than to abide in the flesh.

Should it not be the business of this life to prepare for the next life, and, in that respect, to prepare to die? But how can a man be prepared for that which he never thinks of? Do you mean to take a leap in the dark? If so, you are in an unhappy condition, and I beseech you as you love your own soul to escape from such peril by the help of God's Holy Spirit.

"Oh," saith one, "but I do not feel called upon to think of it." Why, the very season of the year calls you to it. Each fading leaf admonishes you. You will most surely have to die; why not think upon the inevitable? It is said that the ostrich buries its head in the sand, and fancies itself secure when it can no longer see the hunter. I can hardly fancy that even a bird can be quite so foolish, and I beseech you do not enact such madness. If I do not think of death, yet death will think of me. If I will not go to death by meditation and consideration, death will come to me. Let me, then, meet it like a man, and to that end let me look it in the face. Death comes into our houses, and steals away our beloved ones. Seldom do I enter this pulpit without missing some accustomed face from its place. Never a week passes over this church without some of our

happy fellowship being caught away to the still happier fellowship above. This week a youthful member has melted away, and her mourning parents are in our midst. We as a congregation are continually being summoned to remember our mortality; and so, whether we will hear him or not, death is preaching to us each time we assemble in this house. Does he come so often with God's message, and shall we refuse to hear? Nay, let us lend a willing ear and heart, and hear what God the Lord would say to us at this time.

Oh! you that are youngest, you that are fullest of health and strength, I lovingly invite you not to put away this subject from you. Remember, the youngest may be taken away. Early in the life of my boys I took them to the old churchyard of Wimbledon and bade them measure some of the little graves within that enclosure, and they found several green hillocks which were shorter than themselves. I tried thus to impress upon their young minds the uncertainty of life. I would have every child remember that he is not too young to die. Let others know that they are not too strong to die. The stoutest trees of the forest are often the first to fall beneath the destroyer's axe. Paracelsus, the renowned physician of old time, prepared a medicine of which he said that if a man took it regularly he could never die, except it were of extreme old age; yet Paracelsus himself died a young man. Those who think they have found the secret of immortality will yet learn that they are under a strong delusion. None of us can discover a spot where we are out of bow-shot of the last enemy, and therefore it would be idiotic to refuse to think of it. A certain vainglorious French Duke forbade his attendants ever to mention death in his hearing; and when

his secretary read to him the words, "The late King of Spain," he turned upon him with contemptuous indignation, and asked him what he meant by it. The poor secretary could only stammer out, "It is a title which they take." Yes indeed, it is a title we shall all take, and it will be well to note how it will befit us. The King of terrors comes to kings, nor does he disdain to strip the pauper of his scanty flesh: to you, to me, to all he comes; let us all make ready for his sure approach.

I. First, then, very solemnly under the teaching of God's Spirit, I call your attention to a piece of PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE: "I *know* that thou wilt bring *me* to death, and to the house appointed for all living." A general truth here receives a personal application.

Job knew that he should be brought to the grave, because he perceived *the universality of that fact in reference to others*. He lived on the verge of an age when life was longer than now; and yet the patriarch had never known a person who had not after a certain age quitted this earthly stage. Cast your eye over every land, glance from the pole to the equator, and along to the other pole, and see if this be not the universal law, that man must be dissolved in death. "It is appointed unto men once to die." Two men alone entered the next world without seeing death, but those two exceptions prove the rule. Another great exception is yet to come, which I would never overlook. Peradventure the Lord Jesus Christ may personally come before we see death, and when he cometh we that are alive and remain shall not fall asleep; but even then "we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." This

is the great exception to the rule, and we cheerfully allow it to dwell upon our minds; but if the Master taries, we ourselves shall not be exempt from the common rule. Die all we must. Dust to dust, ashes to ashes, must be the last word for us among the sons of men. I hope nobody here is so foolish as to suppose that he shall live on, and never be gathered with the great assembly in the house appointed for all living. Last week one poor fanatic who taught that she herself would never see corruption, was taken from the midst of her dupes to be laid in the sepulchre. A clergyman whom I well knew lectured upon his having found the means of living here for ever; but he, too, has gone over to the great majority. That we can avoid the grave is a dream, an idle dream, not worthy of a moment's controversy. All flesh shall see corruption in due time, if it be not changed at the Lord's coming. "What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death? Shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave?" In their myriads the races of the past have subsided into the earth. In one endless harvest death has reaped down all of woman born. Job knew that he himself should be brought to death because all others had been brought there.

He knew it also because *he had considered the origin of mankind*. In our text the Hebrew expression would run somewhat thus: "I know that thou wilt bring me to death." He had never died before; yet the expression is constantly used, as in the following passage—"Thou turnedst man to destruction; and sayest, Return, ye children of men." We were never in the grave before: how then can we return? Was it not said to Adam, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return"? We were taken out of the earth, and it is

only by a prolonged miracle that this dust of ours is kept from going back to its kindred: the day will come when our earth shall embrace its mother, and so the body shall return to its original. If we had come from heaven we might dream that we should not die; if we had been cast in some celestial mould, as angels are, we might fancy that the grave would never encase us; but being of the earth earthy, we must go back to earth. Job says, "I have said to corruption, Thou art my father: to the worm, Thou art my mother, and my sister." Thus we have affinities which call us back to the dust. Job knew this, and therefore seeing whence he came, he inferred, and inferred correctly, that he himself would return to the earth.

Further, *Job had a recollection of man's sin*, and knew that all men are under condemnation on account of it. Does he not say that the grave is a "house appointed for all living"? It is appointed simply because of the penal sentence passed upon our first parent, and in him upon the whole race. "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return," was not for father Adam only, but for all the innumerable sons that come of his loins. "Death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." "In Adam all die." Our babes, who have not personally sinned, yet feel the blight of Adam's sin, and wither in the bud: our dear children who are nearing manhood and womanhood are cut down and gathered in their beauty; we also, in the prime and flower of life, bow our heads before the killing wind of death. As for our sires, bending each man upon his staff, their posture salutes the tomb towards which they bend. A common fall, and a common sin, have brought on us universal death. Look on our vast cemeteries, and say, "Who slew all these"? The

only answer is, "Death came by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."

Once more, *Job arrived at this personal knowledge through his own bodily feebleness.* Perhaps he had not always said, "I know that thou wilt bring *me* to death"; but now, as he sits upon the dunghill, and scrapes himself with the potsherd, and writhes in anguish, and is depressed in spirit, he realizes his own mortality. When the tent pole quivers in the storm, and the covering thereof flaps to and fro in the wind, and the whole structure threatens to dissolve in the tempest, then the tenant of the habitation, chilled to his marrow, needs not to be instructed that his tabernacle is frail: he knows it well enough. We need many touches of the rod of affliction before we really learn the undeniable truth of our mortality. Every man, woman, and child in this place would unite with me in saying, "I know that thou wilt bring *me* to death"; and yet it is highly probable that a large number of us do not know this to be so. "It is a common-place matter of fact which we all admit," cries one. I know it is so; and yet in the very commonness of the truth their lies a temptation to overlook its personal application. We know this as though we knew it not. To many it is not taken into the reckoning, and it is not a factor in their being. They do not number their days so as to apply their hearts unto wisdom. That poet was half inspired who said, "All men count all men mortal but themselves." Is it not so with us? We do not really expect to die. We reckon that we shall live a very considerable time yet. Even those who are very aged still think that as a few others have lived to an extreme old age, so may they. I am afraid there are few who could say with a gracious soldier, "I thank

God I fear not death. These thirty years together I never rose from my bed in the morning and reckoned upon living till night."

Those who die daily will die easily. Those who make themselves familiar with the tomb will find it transfigured into a bed: the charnel will become a couch. The man who rejoices in the covenant of grace is cheered by the fact that even death itself is comprehended among the things which belong to the believer. I would to God we had learned this lesson. We should not then put death aside amongst the lumber, nor set it upon the shelf among the things which we never intend to use. Let us live as dying men among dying men, and then we shall truly live. This will not make us unhappy; for surely no heir of heaven will fret because he is not doomed to live here for ever. It were a sad sentence if we were bound over to dwell in this poor world for ever. Who among us would wish to realize in his own person the fabled life of the Wandering Jew, or even of Prester John? Who desires to go up and down among the sons of men for twice a thousand years? If the Supreme should say, "Live here for ever," it were a malediction rather than a benediction. To grow ripe and to be carried home like shocks of corn in their season, is not this a fit and fair thing? To labor through a blessed day, and then at nightfall to go home and to receive the wages of grace—is there anything dark and dismal about that? God forgive you that you ever thought so! If you are the Lord's own child, I invite you to look this home-going in the face until you change your thought and see no more in it of gloom and dread, but a very heaven of hope and glory.

Suffer not my text to be a dirge, but turn it into a

golden psalm, as you say, "I know that thou wilt bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living."

II. Having thus discoursed upon a piece of personal knowledge, I now beg you to see in my text the shining of HOLY INTELLIGENCE. Peradventure, when I read the words in your hearing, you did not notice all they contain. Let me then point out to you certain hidden jewels. Job, even in his anguish, does not for a moment forget his God. He speaks of him here: "I know that *thou* wilt bring me to death." *He perceives that he will not die apart from God.* He does not say his sore boils or his strangulation will bring him to death; but "Thou wilt bring me to death." He does not trace his approaching death to chance, or to fate, or to second causes; no, he sees only the hand of the Lord. To him belong both life and death. Say not that the wasting consumption took away your darling; complain not that a fierce fever slew your father; but feel that the Lord himself hath done it. "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good." Blame not the accident, neither complain of the pestilence; for Jehovah himself gathereth home his own. He only will remove you and me." "I know that *thou* wilt bring *me* to death." There is to my heart much delicious comfort in the language before us. I love that old-fashioned verse—

"Plagues and deaths around me fly,
Till he bids I cannot die;
Not a single shaft can hit
Till the God of Love thinks fit."

In the midst of malaria and pest we are safe with God. "Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; there shall

no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling." Beneath the shadow of Jehovah's wing we need not be afraid for the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flieth by day, nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness. We are immortal till our work is done. Be ye therefore quiet in the day of evil; rest you peaceful in the day of destruction: all things are ordered by wisdom, and precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints. No forces in the world are outside of his control. God suffers no foes to trespass on the domain of Providence. All things are ordained of God, and specially are our deaths under the peculiar oversight of our exalted Lord and Saviour. He liveth and was dead, and beareth the keys of death at his girdle. He himself shall guide us through death's iron gate. Surely what the Lord wills and what he himself works cannot be otherwise than acceptable to his chosen! Let us rejoice that in life and death we are in the Lord's hands.

The text seems to me to cover another sweet and comforting thought, namely, that *God will be with us in death*. "I know that thou wilt bring me to death." He will bring us on our journey till he brings us to the journey's end; himself our convoy and our leader. We shall have the Lord's company even to our dying hour: "Thou wilt bring me to death." He leadeth me even to those still waters which men so much fear. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." Beloved, we live with God, do we not? Shall we not die with him? Our life is one long holiday when the Lord Jesus keeps us company; will he leave us at the end? Because God is with us we go forth with joy, and are

led forth with peace; the mountains and the hills break forth before us into singing, and all the trees of the field do clap their hands. Will they not be equally glad when we rise to our eternal reward? It is not living that is happiness, but living with God; it is not dying that will be wretchedness, but dying without God. The child has to go to bed, but it does not cry, if mother is going upstairs with it. It is quite dark: but what of that? The mother's eyes are lamps to the child. It is very lonely and still. Not so; the mother's arms are the child's company, and her voice is its music. O Lord, when the hour comes for me to go to bed, I know that thou wilt take me there, and speak lovingly into my ear; therefore I cannot fear, but will even look forward to that hour of thy manifested love. You had not thought of that, had you? You have been afraid of death: but you cannot be so any longer if your Lord will bring you there in his arms of love. Dismiss all fear, and calmly proceed on your way, though the shades thicken around you; for the Lord is thy light and thy salvation.

It may not be in the text, but it naturally follows from it, that *if God brings us to death, he will bring us up again*. Job, in another passage, declared that he was sure that God would vindicate his cause—"I know," saith he, "that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God." Certain wise men who would expunge the very idea of a resurrection out of the Old Testament, have tried to make out that Job expected to be restored and vindicated in this life; but he evidently did not expect any such thing, for, according to the text, it is clear that he feared he should die

at once. We gather from this verse, by a negative process of reasoning, that the living Redeemer, and the vindication which was to be brought to him by that living Redeemer, were matters of hope in another life after death. O beloved, you and I know this truth from many declarations of our Lord in his divine book. Though we die in one sense, yet in another we shall not die, but live. Though our bodies shall for a little while sleep in their lowly resting-places, our souls shall be for ever with the Lord. We shall spend an interval as unclothed spirits in the company of him to whom we are united by vital bonds, and then the trump of the archangel shall summon our bodies from their sleeping places to be reunited with our souls. These bodies, the comrades of our warfare, shall be companions of our victory. "This mortal must put on immortality." He who raised up Jesus shall also raise us up. We shall come forth from the land of the enemy in fulness of joy. Wherefore we ought to take great comfort from the words of our text, and be of good courage. We shall die: there is no discharge in this war. We shall die: let us not sit down like cowards, and weep tears bitter with despair. We sorrow not as those that are without hope. Let us view our departure in the soft and mellow light which is shed upon it by the words, "Thou shalt bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living."

III. I pass on to notice the QUIET EXPECTATION which breathes in this text. It is my prayer that we may enjoy the same restfulness. My dear brothers and sisters, the text is full of a calm stillness of hope. Job speaks of his death as a certainty, but speaks of it without regret; nay, more, if you read the connection, it is with a smile of desire, with a flush of expectancy

—“I know that thou wilt bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living.” Many men are unable to regard death with composure: they are disturbed and alarmed by the very hint of it. I want to reason with those disciples of our Lord Jesus who are in bondage from fear of death. What are the times when men are able to speak of death quietly and happily? Sometimes they do so *in periods of great bodily suffering*. I have on several occasions felt everything like fear of dying taken from me simply by the process of weariness; for I could not wish to live any longer in such pain as I then endured; and I have no doubt that such an experience is common among sufferers from acute disorders. The sons and daughters of affliction are not only trained to wait the Lord’s will, but they are even driven to desire to depart: they would sooner rest from so stern a struggle than continue the fierce conflict. It is well that pain and anguish should cut the ropes which moor us to these earthly shores, that we may spread our sails for a voyage to the Better Land. Oh, what a place heaven must be to those whose bones have worn through their skin through long lying upon the bed of anguish! What a change from the workhouse or the infirmary to the New Jerusalem! I have stood at the bedside of suffering saints where I could not but weep at the sight of their pains: what a transition from such agony to bliss! Track the glorious flight of the chosen one from yon weary couch to the crown, the harp, the palm-branch, and the King in his beauty. The bitter suffering of the body helps the believer to look upon his translation as a thing to be desired.

The growing infirmities of age work in the same way. Yonder venerable sister has at length become quite

deaf. Her great delight was to attend the house of God, and she comes now; but the service is dumb show to her; she cannot hear her pastor's voice, which was once so sweet in her ear. Her eyes, after being helped with more powerful glasses, are at length unable to read that dear old Bible which remained her sole solace when she could not hear. Her existence now is but half life: she cannot walk far; even in crossing the room her limbs tremble. She is already half gone. Do you not think that she will now feel happy to quit life, even as a ripe apple easily leaves the tree? At any rate, there will be little strength with which to resist the plucking of death's hand. It will be well when the spirit breaks away from the dilapidated hovel of the time-worn body, and rises to the building of God, the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Many of God's aged servants who have been spared to advanced years, have come to look out for the setting of earth's sun without a fear of darkness. While they have seemed to have one foot in the grave, they have really had one foot in heaven.

Beloved, without either falling into sickness, or ageing into infirmity, we can reach this state of mind in another way—*by being filled with an entire submission to the will of God.* When the decree of God is our delight, we feel no abhorrence to anything which he appoints either in life or in death. If we are living as Christians ought to live, we have denied our self-will, and we have accepted the Lord to be the arbiter of all events, the absolute ruler of our being. If your soul is truly married to Christ, you find your supreme bliss in the Bridegroom's will. Your cry is, "Thy will be done." This should be our ordinary condition in daily

life; and it is an admirable preparation for thinking of death with composure. Let me live, if God will be with me in life; let me die, if he will be with me in death. So long as we are "for ever with the Lord," what matters where else we are? We will not further ask when or where: our *when* is "for ever," our *where* is "with the Lord." Delight in God is the cure for dread of death.

Next, I believe that *great holiness* sets us free from the love of this world, and makes us ready to depart. By great holiness I mean great horror of sin, and great longing after perfect purity. When a man feels sin within him he hates it, and longs to be delivered from it. He loathes the sin that is around him, and cries, "Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar!" Have you ever been cast in the midst of blasphemers? I am sure you have then sighed to be in heaven. If you have been sickened by the drunkenness and debauchery of this city, you have cried, "Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest." Did you not wish as much last year when the lid was being lifted from the reeking caldron of London's unnatural lust? I am sure I did. I sighed for a lodge in some vast wilderness where rumor of such villany might never reach me more. In the midst of human sin, if the trumpet were sounded "up and away," you would be glad to hear it, that you might speed to the fair land where sin and sorrow will never assail you again.

Another thing that will make us look at death with complacency is *when we have a full assurance that we are in Christ*, and that, come what may, nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Doubt your salvation and you may

well be afraid to die. Let even a shadow of doubt fall athwart the clear mirror in which you see your loving Lord, and you will be disquieted. If you can say, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day," you cannot fear. What reason can you have for alarm? A Christian man should go to his bed at night without an anxious care as to whether he shall wake up in this world or in the next. He should so live that nothing would need to be altered if his last hour should strike.

Let us imitate Mr. Wesley's calm anticipation of his end. A lady once asked Mr. Wesley, "Suppose that you knew you were to die at twelve o'clock to-morrow night, how would you spend the intervening time?" "How, madam?" he replied, "why just as I intend to spend it now. I should preach this evening at Gloucester, and again at five to-morrow morning; after that I should ride to Tewkesbury, preach in the afternoon, and meet the society in the evening. I should then repair to friend Martin's house, who expects to entertain me; converse and pray with the family as usual; retire to my room at ten o'clock, commend myself to my heavenly Father, lie down to rest, and wake up in glory."

Live in such a way that any day would make a suitable topstone for life. Live so that you need not change your mode of living, even if your sudden departure were immediately predicted to you. When you so live you will look upon death without fear. We usually fear because we have cause for fear; when all is right we shall bid farewell to terror.

Let me add that there are times *when our joys run high*, when the big waves come rolling in from the

Pacific of eternal bliss; then we see the King in his beauty by the eye of faith, and though it be but a dim vision, we are so charmed with it that our love of him makes us impatient to behold him face to face. Have you not sometimes felt that you could sit in this congregation and sing yourself away to everlasting bliss? These high-days and holidays are not always with us. All the days of the week are not Sabbaths, and all our halting-places are not Elims. Brethren, when we do play upon the high-sounding cymbals then we are for joining the angelic chorus. When we feel heaven within us, and stand like the cherubim above the mercy-seat with outstretched wings, then we do not dread the thought of speedy flight. "Now, Lord, what wait I for? My hope is in thee." Yea, we even cry with Simeon, "Now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word." Brethren, we shall soon be on the wing. Then will we rise and sing, and sing as we rise. We will ascend yon azure sky, and within the jewelled portal we will spend eternity in praise.

I hope some of you are getting up a bit out of your notion that to think of death is gloomy work. I trust you will begin to view it with hope and confidence.

IV. I conclude by saying that this subject affords US SACRED INSTRUCTION. "I know that thou wilt bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living." Brethren and sisters, I shall not always have the privilege of coming here upon the Sabbath, to speak with you. Perhaps, ere long, another voice will invite your attention, and I shall be silent in the grave. Neither will you mingle in this throng which so happily gathers here: not much longer will you sit

among those who frequent these lower courts. What then?

Let us prepare for death. Let us cleave to the Lord Jesus, who is our all. Make your calling and election sure. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and believe intensely. Repent of sin and fly from it earnestly and with your whole heart.

Live diligently. Live while you live. Let every moment be spent as you will wish to have spent it when you survey life from your last pillow. Let us live unto God in Christ by the Holy Ghost. May the Lord quicken our pace by the thought that it is but a little while! A short day will not allow of loitering. Do we not live too much as if we played at living? A man will preach a poor sermon if he thinks, "I shall preach for another twenty years." We must preach as though we ne'er might preach again. You will teach that class very badly this afternoon if you have a notion that you can afford to be a little slovenly, since you can make up in the future for the neglects of the present. Drop no stitches. Do all your work at your best. Do a day's work in a day, and have no balance of debt to carry over to to-morrow's account. Soon shall you and I stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, to give an account of the things done in the body: therefore let us live as in the light of that day of days, doing work which may bear that fierce light which beats about the great white throne.

Next to that, let us learn from the general assembly in the house appointed for all living to *walk very humbly*. A common caravansary must accommodate us all in the end; wherefore let us despise all pride of birth, rank, or wealth. There are no distinctions in the last meeting-house: the rich and the poor meet to-

gether, and the slave is free from his master. I hate that pride which makes persons carry themselves as if they were more than mortal. "I have said, Ye are gods; but ye shall die like men." A voice from the tombs proclaims a grim equality in death—

"Princes, this clay must be your bed,
In spite of all your towers;
The tall, the wise, the reverend head
Must lie as low as ours."

Therefore speak no more so exceeding proudly. It is madness for dying men to boast. When Saladin lay a-dying he bade them take his winding sheet and carry it upon a lance through the camp, with the proclamation, "This is all that remains of the mighty Saladin, the conqueror of nations." A lingerer in the graveyard will take up your skull one day and moralize upon it, little knowing how wise a man you were. None will then do you reverence. Therefore be humble.

Be prompt, for life is brief. If your children are to be trained up in God's fear, begin with them to-day; if you are to win souls, continue at the holy labor without pause. You will soon be gone from all opportunity of doing good; therefore, whatsoever your hand finds to do, do it with your might. When the Eastern Emperors were crowned at Constantinople, it is said to have been a custom for the royal mason to set before his majesty a certain number of marble slabs, one of which he was to choose to be his tombstone. It was well for him to remember his funeral at his coronation. I bring before you now the unwritten marbles of life: which will you have, holiness or sin, Christ or self? When you have chosen, you will begin to write the inscription upon it; for your life's works will be your memorial.

God help us to be diligent in his business, for it is not long that we can be at it!

Men and women, *project yourselves into eternity*; get away from time, for you must soon be driven away from it. You are birds with wings; sit not on these boughs for ever blinking in the dark like owls; bestir yourselves, and mount like eagles. Rise to the heights above the present. Life is a short day at its longest, and when its sun goes down it leaves you in eternity. Eternal woe or eternal joy will fill your undying spirit. Your indestructible self must swim in endless bliss or sink in fathomless misery. If you mean to be lost count the cost, and know what you are doing. If you have set your mind on sin and its consequences, do the deed deliberately, and do not make a sport of it. Oh, sirs, some of you will one of these days wake up as from an awful dream. Oh that you could foresee the scene which awaits you! Those were strong words, but they were the words of Jesus—“And in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments.” These words reveal none of that pretty nonsense which some prattle about—“a larger hope”: yet Jesus spake them, and his hope was of the largest. He that loved you better than these philosophers love you, also said, “Beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence.” Our Lord put it very strongly. If you mean to dare the infernal terrors, I can do no less than ask you to know what you are at. If you have chosen sin you have chosen ruin. Begin to consider it, and see whether it is worth while.

But if you have chosen Christ, mercy, and eternal life, and if by faith these are yours, begin to enjoy

them now. Rehearse the music of the skies. Taste the delights of fellowship with God even here! Rejoice in the victory which now overcometh the world, even our faith. You will be in the glory land ere long, and some of you much sooner than you think. So, as the sermon ends, under a sense of my own frailty I bid you a sincere adieu. Until the day break and the shadows flee away—*fare you well.*

XV.

LOVE'S COMPLAINING.

October 24, 1886.

“Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works : or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.”—REVELATION ii. 4, 5.

It was the work of the priest to go into the holy place and to trim the seven-branched lamp of gold: see how our Great High Priest walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks: his work is not occasional, but constant. Wearing robes which are at once royal and priestly, he is seen lighting the holy lamps, pouring in the sacred oil, and removing impurities which would dim the light.

Hence our Lord's fitness to deal with the churches, which are these golden lamp-stands, for no one knows so much about the lamps as the person whose *constant* work it is to watch them and trim them. No one knows the churches as Jesus does, for the care of all the churches daily comes upon him, he continually walks among them, and holds their ministers as stars in his right hand. His eyes are perpetually upon the churches, so that he knows their works, their sufferings, and their sins; and those eyes are as a flame of fire, so that he sees with a penetration, discernment, and accuracy to which no other can attain. *We* sometimes judge the condition of religion too leniently, or

else we err on the other side, and judge too severely. Our eyes are dim with the world's smoke; but his eyes are as a flame of fire. He sees the churches through and through, and knows their true condition much better than they know themselves. The Lord Jesus Christ is a most careful observer of churches and of individuals: nothing is hid from his observant eye.

As he is the most *careful* observer, so he is the most candid. He is ever "the faithful and true witness." He loves much, and therefore he never judges harshly. He loves much, and therefore he always judges jealously. Jealousy is the sure attendant of such love as his. He will neither speak smooth words nor bitter words; but he will speak the truth—the truth in love, the truth as he himself perceives it, and as he would have us perceive it. Well may he say, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches," since his sayings are so true, so just, so weighty.

Certainly no observer can be so *tender* as the Son of God. Those lamps are very precious to him: it cost him his life to light them. "Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it." Every church is to our Lord a more sublime thing than a constellation in the heavens: as he is precious to his saints so are they precious to him. He careth little for empires, kingdoms, or republics; but his heart is set on the kingdom of righteousness, of which his cross is the royal standard. He must reign until his foes are vanquished, and this is the great thought of his mind at this present, "From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool." He ceases not to watch over his church: his sacrifice is ended, but not his service in caring for the golden lamps. He has completed the redemption of his bride, but he continues her preservation.

I therefore feel at this time that we may well join in a prayer to our Lord Jesus to come into our midst and put our light in order. Oh for a visit from himself, such as he paid in vision to the seven churches of Asia! With him is the oil to feed the living flame, and he knows how to pour it in according to due measure; with him are those golden snuffers with which to remove every superfluity of naughtiness, that our lights may so shine before men, that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father which is in heaven. Oh for his presence now, to search us and to sanctify us; to cause us to shine forth to his Father's praise! We would be judged of the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world. We would pray this morning, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." All things are naked and open to the eyes of him with whom we have to do; and we delight to have it so. We invite thee, O great High Priest, to come into this thy sanctuary, and look to this thy lamp this morning.

In the text, as it is addressed to the church at Ephesus and to us, we note three things. First, we note that *Christ perceives*: "I know thy works . . . nevertheless I have somewhat against thee." Secondly, *Christ prescribes*: "Remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen, and repent," and so forth. Thirdly, *Christ persuades*—persuades with a threatening: "I will remove thy candlestick out of his place"; persuades, also, with a promise: "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." If the Lord himself be here at this time, our plan of discourse will be

a river of life; but if he be not among us by his Holy Spirit, it will be as the dry bed of a torrent which bears the name of "river," but lacks the living stream. We expect our Lord's presence: he will come to the lamps which his office calls upon him to trim; it has been his wont to be with us; some of us have met him this morning already, and we have constrained him to tarry with us.

I. First, then, we notice that HE PERCEIVES.

Our Lord sorrowfully perceives the faults of his church—"Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee"; but *he does not so perceive those faults as to be forgetful of that which he can admire and accept*; for he begins his letter with condemnations, "I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil." Do not think, my brethren, that our Beloved is blind to the beauties of his church. On the contrary, he delights to observe them. He can see beauties where she herself cannot see them. Where we observe much to deplore, his loving eyes see much to admire. The graces which he himself creates he can always perceive. When we in the earnestness of self-examination overlook them and write bitter things against ourselves, the Lord Jesus sees even in those bitter self-condemnations a life and earnestness and sincerity which he loves. Our Lord has a keen eye for all that is good. When he searches our hearts he never passes by the faintest longing, or desire, or faith, or love, of any of his people. He says, "I know thy works."

But this is our point at this time, that while Jesus can see all that is good, *yet in very faithfulness he sees all that is evil*. His love is not blind. He does not say, "As many as I love I commend"; but, "As many as

I love I rebuke and chasten." It is more necessary for us that we should make a discovery of our faults than of our virtues. So notice in this text that Christ perceiveth the flaw in his church, even in the midst of her earnest service. The church at Ephesus was full of work. "I know thy works and thy labor, and for my name's sake thou hast labored, and hast not fainted." It was such a laborious church that it pushed on and on with diligent perseverance, and never seemed to flag in its divine mission. Oh that we could say as much of all our churches! I have lived to see many brilliant projects lighted and left to die out in smoke. I have heard of schemes which were to illuminate the world; but not a spark remains. Holy perseverance is a great desideratum. In these three and thirty years we thank God he has enabled us to labor and not to faint. There has been a continuance of everything attempted, and no drawing back from anything. "This is the work, this is the labor," to hold out even to the end. O how I have dreaded lest we should have to give up any holy enterprise or cut short any gracious effort! Hitherto the Lord has helped us. With men and means, liberality and zeal, he has supplied us. In this case the angel of the church has been very little of an angel from heaven, but very much of a human angel; for in the weakness of my flesh and in the heaviness of my spirit have I pursued my calling; but I have pursued it. By the help of God I continue to this day, and this church with equal footsteps is at my side; for which the whole praise is due to the Lord, who fainteth not, neither is weary. Having put my hand to the plough, I have not looked back, but have steadily pressed forward, making straight furrows; but it has been by the grace of God alone.

Alas! under all the laboring the Lord Jesus perceived that the Ephesians had left their first love; and this was a grievous fault. So it may be in this church; every wheel may continue to revolve, and the whole machinery of ministry may be kept going at its normal rate, and yet there may be a great secret evil which Jesus perceives, and this may be marring all.

But this church at Ephesus was not only laborious, it was patient in suffering great persecution. He says of it: "I know thy works and thy patience, and how thou hast borne, and hast patience, and hast not fainted." Persecution upon persecution visited the faithful, but they bore it all with holy courage and constancy, and continued still confessing their Lord. This was good, and the Lord highly approved it; but yet underneath it he saw the tokens of decline; they had left their first love. So there may seem to be all the patient endurance and dauntless courage that there should be, and yet as a fair apple may have a worm at its core, so may it be with the church when it looks best to the eye of friends.

The Ephesian church excelled in something else, namely, in its discipline, its soundness in the faith, and fidelity towards heretics; for the Lord says of it, "how thou canst not bear them which are evil." They would not have it: they would not tolerate false doctrine, they would not put up with unclean living. They fought against evil, not only in the common people, but in prominent individuals. "Thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars." They had dealt with the great ones; they had not flinched from the unmasking of falsehood. Those who seemed to be apostles they had dragged to the light and discovered to be de-

ceivers. This church was not honeycombed with doubt; it laid no claim to breadth of thought and liberality of view; it was honest to its Lord. He says of it, "This thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate." This was grand of them: it showed a backbone of truth. I wish some of the churches of this age had a little of this holy decision about them; for nowadays, if a man be clever, he may preach the vilest lie that was ever vomited from the mouth of hell, and it will go down with some. He may assail every doctrine of the gospel, he may blaspheme the Holy Trinity, he may trample on the blood of the Son of God, and yet nothing shall be said about it if he be held in repute as a man of advanced thought and liberal ideas. The church of Ephesus was not of this mind. She was strong in her convictions: she could not yield the faith, nor play the traitor to her Lord. For this her Lord commended her: and yet he says, "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." When love dies orthodox doctrine becomes a corpse, a powerless formalism. Adhesion to the truth sours into bigotry when the sweetness and light of love to Jesus depart. Love Jesus, and then it is well to hate the deeds of the Nicolaitanes; but mere hate of evil will tend to evil if love of Jesus be not there to sanctify it. I need not make a personal application; but that which is spoken to Ephesus may be spoken at this hour to ourselves. As we hope that we may appreciate the commendation, so let us see whether the expostulation may not also apply to us. "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." Thus I have shown you that Jesus sees the evil beneath all the good: he does not ignore the good, but he will not pass over the ill.

So, next, *this evil was a very serious one* ; it was love declining: "Thou hast left thy first love." "Is that serious?" saith one. It is the most serious of all; for the church is the bride of Christ, and for a bride to fail in love is to fail in all things. It is idle for the wife to say that she is obedient, and so forth: if love to her husband has evaporated, her wifely duty cannot be fulfilled, she has lost the very life and soul of the marriage state. So, my brethren, this is a most important matter, our love to Christ, because it touches the very heart of that communion with him which is the crown and essence of our spiritual life. As a church we must love Jesus, or else we have lost our reason for existence. A church has no reason for being a church when she has no love within her heart, or when that love grows cold. Have I not often reminded you that almost any disease may be hopefully endured except disease of the heart? But when our sickness is a disease of the heart, it is full of danger; and it was so in this case: "Thou hast left thy first love." It is a disease of the heart, a central, a fatal disease, unless the great Physician shall interpose to stay its progress, and to deliver us from it. Oh, in any man, in any woman, any child of God here, let alone in the church as a whole, if there be a leaving of the first love, it is a woeful thing! Lord, have mercy upon us; Christ, have mercy upon us: this should be our solemn litany at once. No peril can be greater than this. Lose love, lose all. Leave our first love, we have left strength, and peace, and joy, and holiness.

I call your attention, however, to this point, that *it was he that found it out*. "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." Jesus himself found it out! I do not know how it strikes you; but

as I thought it over, this fact brought the tears to my eyes. When I begin to leave off loving Christ, or love him less than I do, I would like to find it out myself; and if I did so, there would soon be a cure for it. But for him to find it out, oh, it seems so hard, so sad a thing! That we should keep on growing cold, and cold, and cold, and never care about it till the Beloved points it out to us. Why even the angel of the church did not find it out; the minister did not know it; but *he* saw it who loves us so well, that he delights in our love, and pines when it begins to fail. To him we are unutterably dear; he loved us up out of the pit into his bosom, loved us up from the dunghill among beggars to sit at his right hand upon his throne; and it is sorrowful that he should have to complain of our cooling love, while we are utterly indifferent to the matter. Does Jesus care more about our love than we do? He loves us better than we love ourselves. How good of him to care one jot about our love! This is no complaint of an enemy, but of a dear wounded friend.

I notice that Jesus *found it out with great pain*. I can hardly conceive a greater grief to him as the husband of his church than to look her in the face and say, "Thou hast left thy first love." What can she give him but love? Will she deny him this? A poor thing is the church of herself: her Lord married her when she was in beggary: and if she does not give him love, what has she to give him? If she begins to be unfaithful in heart to him, what is she worth? Why, an unloving wife is a foul fountain of discomfort and dishonor to her husband. O beloved, shall it be so with thee? Wilt thou grieve Emmanuel? Wilt thou wound thy Well-beloved? Church of God, wilt thou grieve him whose heart was pierced for thy re-

demption? Brother, sister, can you and I let Jesus find out that our love is departing, that we are ceasing to be zealous for his name? Can we wound him so? Is not this to crucify the Lord afresh? Might he not hold up his hands this morning with fresh blood upon them, and say, "These are the wounds which I received in the house of my friends. It was nothing that I died for them, but ill it is that, after having died for them, they have failed to give me their hearts"? Jesus is not so sick of our sin as of our lukewarmness. It is a sad business to my heart: I hope it will be sad to all whom it concerns, that our Lord should be the first to spy out our declines in love.

The Saviour, having thus seen this with pain, now points it out. As I read this passage over to myself, I noticed that the Saviour had nothing to say about the sins of the heathen among whom the Ephesians dwell: they are alluded to because it must have been the heathen who persecuted the church, and caused it to endure, and exhibit patience. The Saviour, however, has nothing to say against the heathen; and he does not say much more than a word about those who were evil. These had been cast out, and he merely says: "Thou canst not bear them which are evil." He denounced no judgment upon the Nicolaitanes, except that he hated them; and even the apostles which were found to be liars the Master dismisses with that word. He leaves the ungodly in their own condemnation. But what he has to say is against his own beloved: "I have somewhat against thee." It seems as if the Master might pass over sin in a thousand others, but he cannot wink at failure of love in his own espoused one. "The Lord thy God is a jealous God." The Saviour loves, so that his love is cruel as the grave

against cold-heartedness. He said of the church of Laodicea, "I will spue thee out of my mouth." This was one of his own churches, too, and yet she made him sick with her lukewarmness. God grant that we may not be guilty of such a crime as that!

The Saviour pointed out the failure of love; and when he pointed it out *he called it by a lamentable name*. "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen." He calls it *a fall* to leave our first love. Brothers, sisters, this church had not been licentious, it had not gone aside to false doctrine, it had not become idle, it had not been cowardly in the hour of persecution; but this one sin summed up the whole—she did not love Christ as she once loved him, and he calls this a fall. A fall indeed it is. "O, I thought," saith one, "that if a member of the church got drunk that was a fall." That is a grievous fall, but it is a fall if we become intoxicated with the world, and lose the freshness of our devotion to Jesus. It is a fall from a high estate of fellowship to the dust of worldliness. "Thou art fallen." The word sounds very harshly in my ears—no, not harshly, for his love speaks it in so pathetic a manner; but it thunders in my soul deep down. I cannot bear it. It is so sadly true. "Thou art fallen." "Remember from whence thou art fallen." Indeed, O Lord, we have fallen when we have left our first love for thee.

The Master evidently counts this decline of love to be a personal wrong done to himself. "I have somewhat against thee." It is not an offence against the king, nor against the judge, but against the Lord Jesus as the husband of the church: an offence against the very heart of Christ himself. "I have somewhat against thee." He does not say, "Thy neighbor has

somewhat against thee, thy child has somewhat against thee, thy God has somewhat against thee," but "I, I thy hope, thy joy, thy delight, thy Saviour, I have this against thee." The word *somewhat* is an intruder here. Our translators put it in italics, and well they might, for it is a bad word, since it seems to make a small thing of a very grave charge. The Lord has *this* against us, and it is no mere "somewhat." Come, brothers and sisters, if we have not broken any law, nor offended in any way so as to grieve anybody else, this is sorrow enough, if our love has grown in the least degree chill towards him; for we have done a terrible wrong to our best friend. This is the bitterness of our offence: Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight, that I have left my first love. The Saviour tells us this most lovingly. I wish I knew how to speak as tenderly as he does; and yet I feel at this moment that I can and must be tender in this matter, for I am speaking about myself as much as about anybody else. I am grieving, grieving over some here present, grieving for all of us, but grieving most of all for myself that our Well-beloved should have cause to say, "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love."

So much for what our Lord perceives. Holy Spirit, bless it to us!

II. And now, secondly, let us note what THE SAVIOUR PRESCRIBES. The Saviour's prescription is couched in these three words: "Remember," "Repent," "Return."

The first word is *Remember*. "Thou hast left thy first love." Remember, then, what thy first love was, and compare thy present condition with it. At first nothing diverted thee from thy Lord. He was thy

life, thy love, thy joy. Now thou lookest for recreation somewhere else, and other charms and other beauties win thy heart. Art thou not ashamed of this? Once thou wast never wearied with hearing of him and serving him. Never wert thou overdone with Christ and his gospel: many sermons, many prayer-meetings, many Bible readings, and yet none too many. Now sermons are long, and services are dull, and thou must have thy jaded appetite excited with novelties. How is this? Once thou wast never displeased with Jesus whatever he did with thee. If thou hadst been sick, or poor, or dying, thou wouldst still have loved and blessed his name for all things. He remembers this fondness, and regrets its departure. He says to thee to-day, "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness." Thou wouldst have gone after thy Lord anywhere in those days: across the sea, or through the fire, thou wouldst have pursued him; nothing would have been too hot or too heavy for thee then. Is it so now? Remember! Remember! Remember from whence thou art fallen. Remember the vows, the tears, the communings, the happy raptures of those days; remember and compare with them thy present state.

Remember and consider, that when thou wast in thy first love, that love was none too warm. Even then, when thou didst live *to* him, and *for* him, and *with* him, thou wast none too holy, none too consecrated, none too zealous. If thou wast not too forward then, what art thou now—now that thou hast come down even from that poor attainment? Remember the past with sad forebodings of the future. If thou hast come down from where thou wast, who is to tell thee where

thou wilt cease thy declining? He who has sunk so far may fall much farther. Is it not so? Though thou sayest in thy heart like Hazael, "Is thy servant a dog?" thou mayest turn out worse than a dog yet, yea, prove a very wolf. Who knows? thou mayest even now be a devil! Thou mayest turn out a Judas, a son of perdition, and deny thy Master, selling him for thirty pieces of silver. When a stone begins to fall it falls with an ever-increasing rate; and when a soul begins to leave its first love, it quits it more and more, and more and more, till at last it falleth terribly. Remember!

The next word of the prescription is "*Repent.*" Repent as thou didst at first. The word so suitable to sinners is suitable to thee, for thou hast grievously sinned. Repent of the wrong thou hast done thy Lord by leaving thy first love of him. Couldst thou have lived a seraphic life, only breathing his love, only existing for him, thou hadst done little enough: but to quit thy first love, how grievously hast thou wronged him! That love was well deserved, was it not? Why, then, hast thou left it? Is Jesus less fair than he was? Does he love thee less than he did? Has he been less kind and tender to thee than he used to be? Say, hast thou outgrown him? Canst thou do without him? Hast thou a hope of salvation apart from him? I charge thee, repent of this thine ill-doing towards one who has a greater claim upon thy love than ever he had. He ought to be to-day loved more than thou didst love him at thy very best! O my heart, is not all this most surely true? How ill art thou behaving! What an ingrate art thou! Repent! Repent!

Repent of much good that thou hast left undone through want of love. Oh, if thou hadst always loved

thy Lord at thy best, what mightest thou not have known of him by this time! What good deeds thou mightest have done by force of his love! How many hearts mightest thou have won for thy Lord if thine own heart had been fuller of love, if thine own soul had been more on fire! Thou hast lived a poor beggarly life because thou hast allowed such poverty of love.

Repent! Repent! To my mind, as I thought over this text, the call for repentance grew louder and louder, because of the occasion of its utterance. Here is the glorious Lord, coming to his church and speaking to her angel in tones of tender kindness. He condescends to visit his people in all his majesty and glory, intending nothing but to manifest himself in love to his own elect as he doth not to the world. And yet he is compelled even then to take to chiding, and to say, "I have this against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." Here is a love-visit clouded with upbraiding—necessary upbraiding. What mischief sin has done! It is a dreadful thing that when Jesus comes to his own dear bride he should have to speak in grief, and not in joy. Must holy communion, which is the wine of heaven, be embittered with the tonic of expostulation? I see the upper springs of nearest fellowship, where the waters of life leap from their first source in the heart of God. Are not these streams most pure and precious? If a man drink thereof he liveth forever. Shall it be that even at the fountain-head they shall be dashed with bitterness? Even when Christ communes personally with us, must he say, "I have somewhat against thee?" Break, my heart, that it should be so! Well may we repent with deep repentance when our choicest joys are

flavored with the bitter herbs of regret, that our best Beloved should have somewhat against us.

But then he says in effect, *Return*. The third word is this—"Repent, and do the first works." Notice, that he does not say, "Repent and get back thy first love." This seems rather singular; but then love is the chief of the first works, and, moreover, the first works can only come of the first love. There must be in every declining Christian a *practical repentance*. Do not be satisfied with regrets and resolves. Do the first works; do not strain after the first emotions, but do the first works. No renewal is so valuable as the practical cleansing of our way. If the life be made right, it will prove that the love is so. In doing the first works you will prove that you have come back to your first love. The prescription is complete, because the doing of the first works is meant to include the feeling of the first feelings, the sighing of the first sighs, the enjoyment of the first joys: these are all supposed to accompany returning obedience and activity.

We are to get back to these first works at once. Most men come to Christ with a leap; and I have observed that many who come back to him usually do so at a bound. The slow revival of one's love is almost an impossibility; as well expect the dead to rise by degrees. Love to Christ is often love at first sight; we see him, and are conquered by him. If we grow cold, the best thing we can do is to fasten our eyes on him till we cry, "My soul melted while my Beloved spake." It is a happy circumstance if I can cry, "Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Amminadib." How sweet for the Lord to put us back again at once into the old place, back again in a

moment! My prayer is that it may be so this morning with any declining one. May you so repent as not merely to feel the old feelings, but instantly to do the first works, and be once more as eager, as zealous, as generous, as prayerful, as you used to be! If we should again see you breaking the alabaster box, we should know that the old love had returned. May the good Master help us to do as well as ever, yea, much better than before!

Notice, however, that this will require much of effort and warfare; for the promise which is made is "to him that overcometh." Overcoming implies conflict. Depend upon it, if you conquer a wandering heart, you will have to fight for it. "To him that overcometh," saith he, "will I give to eat of the tree of life." You must fight your way back to the garden of the Lord. You will have to fight against lethargy, against an evil heart of unbelief, against the benumbing influence of the world. In the name and power of him who bids you repent, you must wrestle and struggle till you get the mastery over self, and yield your whole nature to your Lord.

So I have shown you how Christ prescribes, and I greatly need a few minutes for the last part, because I wish to dwell with solemn earnestness upon it. I have no desire to say a word by which I should show myself off as an orator, but I long to speak a word by which I may prove myself a true brother pleading with you in deep sympathy, because in all the ill which I rebuke I mourn my own personal share. Bless us, O Spirit of the Lord!

III. Now see, brethren, HE PERSUADES. This is the third point: the Lord Jesus persuades his erring one to repent.

First, he *persuades with a warning*: "I will come unto thee"; "quickly" is not in the original: the Revised Version has left it out. Our Lord is generally very slow at the work of judgment: "I will come unto thee, and will remove thy candlestick out of its place except thou repent." This he must do: he cannot allow his light to be apart from love, and if the first love be left, the church shall be left in darkness. The truth must always shine, but not always in the same place. The place must be made fit by love, or the light shall be removed.

Our Lord means, first, I will take away the comfort of the Word. He raises up certain ministers, and makes them burning and shining lights in the midst of his church, and when the people gather together they are cheered and enlightened by their shining. A ministry blessed of the Lord is a singular comfort to the church of God. The Lord can easily take away that light which has brought comfort to so many: he can remove the good man to another sphere, or he can call him home to his rest. The extinguisher of death can put out the candle which now gladdens the house. The church which has lost a ministry by which the Lord's glory has shone forth has lost a good deal; and if this loss has been sent in chastisement for decline of love, it is all the harder to bear. I can point you to places where once was a man of God, and all went well: but the people grew cold, and the Lord took away their leader, and the place is now a desolation: those who now attend those courts and listen to a modern ministry cry out because of the famine of the word of the Lord. O friends, let us value the light while we have it, and prove that we do so by profiting by it: but how can we profit if we leave

our first love? The Lord may take away our comfort as a church if our first zeal shall die down.

But the candlestick also symbolizes usefulness: it is that by which a church shines. The use of a church is to preserve the truth, wherewith to illuminate the neighborhood, to illuminate the world. God can soon cut short out usefulness, and he will do so if we cut short our love. If the Lord be withdrawn, we can go on with our work as we used to do, but nothing will come of it; we can go on with Sunday-schools, mission-stations, branch churches, and yet accomplish nothing. Brethren, we can go on with the Orphanage, the College, the Colportage, the Evangelistic Society, the Book Fund, and all else, and yet nothing will be effected if the arm of the Lord be not made bare.

He can, if he wills, even take away from the church her very existence as a church. Ephesus is gone: nothing but ruins can be found. Rome once held a noble church of Christ, but has not her name become the symbol of antichrist? The Lord can soon take away candlesticks out of their places if the church uses her light for her own glory, and is not filled with his love. God forbid that we should fall under this condemnation! Of thy mercy, O Lord, forbid it! Let it not so happen to any one of us. Yet this may occur to us as individuals. You, dear brother or sister, if you lose your first love, may soon lose your joy, your peace, your usefulness. You, who are now so bright, may grow dull. You, who are now so useful, may become useless. You were once an instructor of the foolish, and a teacher of babes; but if the Lord be withdrawn you will instruct nobody, you will be in the dark yourself. Alas! you may come to lose the very name of Christians, as some have done who once

seemed to be burning and shining lights. They were foolish virgins, and ere long they were heard to cry, "Our lamps are gone out!" The Lord can and will take away the candlestick out of its place if we put *him* out of his place by a failure in our love to him.

How can I persuade you, then, better than with the warning words of my Master? My beloved, I persuade you from my very soul not to encounter these dangers, not to run these terrible risks; for as you would not wish to see either the church or your own self left without the light of God, to pine in darkness, it is needful that you abide in Christ, and go on to love him more and more.

The Saviour holds out a promise as his other persuasive. Upon this I can only dwell for a minute. It seems a very wonderful promise to me: "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." Observe, those who lose their first love *fall*, but those who abide in love are made to stand. In contrast to the fall which took place in the paradise of God, we have man eating of the tree of life, and so living for ever. If we, through grace, overcome the common tendency to decline in love, then shall we be confirmed and settled in the favor of the Lord. By eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil we fell; by eating of the fruit of a better tree we live and stand fast for ever. Life proved true by love shall be nourished on the best of food: it shall be sustained by fruit from the garden of the Lord himself, gathered by the Saviour's own hand.

Note again, those who lose their first love wander far, they depart from God. "But," saith the Lord, "if you keep your first love you shall not wander, but

you shall come into closer fellowship. I will bring you nearer to the centre. I will bring you to eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God." The inner ring is for those who grow in love ; the centre of all joy is only to be reached by much love. We know God as we love God. We enter into his paradise as we abide in his love. What joy is here ! What a reward hath love !

Then notice the mystical blessing which lies here, waiting your meditation. Do you know how we fell ? The woman took of the fruit of the forbidden tree, and gave to Adam, and Adam ate and fell. The reverse is the case in the promise before us : the Second Adam takes of the divine fruit from the tree of promise, and hands it to his spouse ; she eats and lives for ever. He who is the Father of the age of grace hands down to us immortal joys, which he has plucked from an unwithering tree. The reward of love is to eat the fruit of life. " We are getting into mysteries," says one. Yes, I am intentionally lifting a corner of the veil, and no more. I only mean to give you a glimpse at the promised boon. Into his innermost joys our Lord will bring us if we keep up our first love, and go from strength to strength therein. Marvellous things are locked up in the caskets whereof love holds the key. Sin sets the angel with a flaming sword between us and the tree of life in the midst of the garden ; but love has quenched that sword, and now the angel beckons us to come into the innermost secrets of paradise. We shall know as we are known when we love as we are loved. We shall live the life of God when we are wholly taken up with the love of God. The love of Jesus answered by our love to Jesus makes the sweetest music the

heart can know. No joy on earth is equal to the bliss of being all taken up with love to Christ. If I had my choice of all the lives that I could live, I certainly would not choose to be an emperor, nor to be a millionaire, nor to be a philosopher; for power, and wealth, and knowledge, bring with them sorrow and travail; but I would choose to have nothing to do but to love my Lord Jesus—nothing, I mean, but to do all things for his sake, and out of love to him. Then I know that I should be in paradise, yea, in the midst of the paradise of God, and I should have meat to eat which is all unknown to men of the world.

Heaven on earth is abounding love to Jesus. This is the first and last of true delight—to love him who is the first and the last. To love Jesus is another name for paradise. Lord, let me know this by continual experience. “You are soaring aloft,” cries one. Yes, I own it. Oh that I could allure you to a heavenward flight upon wings of love! There is bitterness in declining love: it is a very consumption of the soul, and makes us weak, and faint, and low. But true love is the antepast of glory. See the heights, the glittering heights, the glorious heights, the everlasting hills to which the Lord of life will conduct all those who are faithful to him through the power of his Holy Spirit. See, O love, thine ultimate abode! I pray that what I have said may be blessed by the Holy Spirit to the bringing of us all nearer to the Bridegroom of our souls. Amen.

XVI.

OUR SYMPATHIZING HIGH PRIEST.

October 31, 1886.

“Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared: though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him; called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec.”—HEBREWS v. 7—10.

THE Holy Spirit in this chapter reminds us that two things were necessary in a high priest; first, he must be suitable for the men for whom he stood; and next, he must be acceptable with God. “Every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God.” He must be fit from both points of view, both man-ward and God-ward. Our Lord Jesus Christ was ordained of God from of old, and did not of himself assume the position of high priest. The prophet spake of him as the Messiah of God, and Jehovah himself declared, “Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.” When he came into the world the Holy Ghost bore witness to his being the Son of the Highest. At his baptism there came a voice from heaven saying, “Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,” and that same voice was thrice heard declaring the same fact. The Father has given further testimony to the mission of Christ, “in that he hath raised him from the dead,” and hath

caused him to enter into the heavenly places on our behalf. Moreover, he has given him a pledge that as Melchisedec, being both king and priest, he shall sit at his right hand until he hath made his enemies his footstool. Our Lord Jesus has been chosen, ordained, and glorified as our "great high priest, that had passed into the heavens." This is the ground-work of our comfort in our Lord Jesus, for we know that he is one with the Father, and that all things are done by him as the messenger of the covenant, the authorized representative of Jehovah our God.

That is not the point to which I call your attention this morning: I would have you follow the text, and consider *the pre-eminent suitability of our Lord Jesus to be a High Priest for us, viewed from the human side.* A high priest must be one "who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way: for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity." He must be one who has learned compassion in the school of suffering, so that he can succor the afflicted. There is no learning sympathy except by suffering. It cannot be studied from a book, it must be written on the heart. You must go through the fire if you would have sympathy with others who tread the glowing coals; you must yourself bear the cross if you would feel for those whose life is a burden to them. Beloved friends, we live in a world of sin and sorrow, and we ourselves are sinful and sorrowful; we need one who can put away our sin and become a sharer in our sorrow. If he cannot go with us through all the rough places of our pilgrim-way, how can he be our guide? If he has never travelled in the night himself, how can he whisper consolation to us in our darkest hours? We have a fully qualified High Priest in our Lord Je-

sus Christ: he is perfect in that capacity. I desire to speak of him this morning in that light. Oh for help from on high; for I feel that it needs the inspiration of the Holy One to enable a man to speak of Jesus as he should be spoken of. No careless utterance must attempt to describe the great High Priest of our profession. It needs a perfect preacher fully to describe a perfect Redeemer; and where is he to be found? To preach a crucified Saviour in a crucified style is no easy task. I take it that a lip needs as much to be touched with a live coal from off the altar to speak of the lowly sympathy of Jesus as to describe his glory. Of the two I had rather venture to speak of the garden of Paradise than of the garden of Gethsemane, apart from the help of the Holy Ghost. O that the divine Instructor would direct our meditations at this time, so that we may glorify Christ, and may with increased confidence repose in him!

I have this further object also: while trying to comfort the people of God, I would persuade others to approach our great High Priest. Oh, how I long that many of you who have hitherto never known the love of Christ, may now be touched with a sense of it, and may be sweetly drawn to him! By the very fact that he is able to sympathize with you in your griefs, I hope that those of you who are afflicted may be induced to draw nigh to him. Oh that upon this spot, and at this hour, you who have been halting and hesitating for years may at once find a shelter with the compassionate One! He waits to give you everlasting comfort; oh that you would believe in him, and enjoy it! We shall pray for this, and look for it; and may God grant us our desire, that so his Son Jesus may be glorified!

The great suitability of Christ for his work will be seen as we view him in three characters. Let us first consider him as *a suppliant*, and this is set forth in the seventh verse: "Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared." Next we would view him as *a Son*: "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered." And then we shall close by regarding him as *a Saviour*: "He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him." Come, Holy Spirit, and take of the things of Christ, and show them unto us.

I. First, then, that we may see the suitability of our Lord to deal with us in our cares and sorrows, we shall view him as A SUPPLIANT.

The text begins with a word which reveals *his weakness*: "Who in the days of his flesh." Our blessed Lord was in such a condition that he pleaded out of weakness with the God who was able to save. When our Lord was compassed with the weakness of flesh he was much in prayer. It would be an interesting exercise for the younger people to note all the times in which the Lord Jesus is said to have prayed. The occasions recorded are very numerous; but these are no doubt merely a few specimens of a far greater number. Jesus was habitually in prayer; he was praying even when his lips did not utter a sound. His heart was always in communion with the Great Father above. This is said to have been the case "in the days of his flesh." This term is used to distinguish his life on earth from his former estate in glory. From of old the Son of God dwelt with the Father; but he was not

then a partaker of human nature, and the eternal ages were not "the days of his flesh." Then he could not have entered into that intimate sympathy with us which he now exercises since he has been born at Bethlehem, and has died at Calvary. "The days of his flesh" intend this mortal life—the days of his weakness, humiliation, labor, and suffering. It is true that he wears our nature in heaven, for he said to his disciples after his resurrection, "Handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have." But yet we should not call the period of his exaltation at the right hand of the Father "the days of his flesh." He prays still; in fact, he continually makes intercession for the transgressors; but it is in another style from that in which he prayed "in the days of his flesh:"

"With cries and tears he offered up
 His humble suit below;
 But with authority he asks,
 Enthroned in glory now."

Among the days of his life on earth there were some which peculiarly deserved to be called "the days of his flesh"—days in which his feebler nature pushed itself to the front. Then men saw less of his greatness as a teacher and more of his suffering as a man. I should call that one of the days of his flesh when he went to Gethsemane, and "was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." He was very heavy, because the shadow of his cross fell upon him with a denser darkness as he drew nearer to his death upon it. When the dread desertion by God which was the centre of his grief began to startle him; when men esteemed him "stricken, smitten of God and afflicted," then were "the days of his flesh." Prostrate under the

olives, pouring out his inmost soul in plaintive entreaties, even to a bloody sweat, you see your Lord a suppliant in weakness—"in the days of his flesh."

Brethren, I beseech you to think of our Lord's pleading "in the days of his flesh" as a matter of fact. Do not dream of him as though he were a phantom, and of his prayers as if they were part of a mere show. He was a real man, and his prayers were as real as yours can be. Believe in Jesus as a man. You would be indignant at any one who would diminish the glory of his Godhead, and most justly so; but oh, do not yourself take away from him the truth of his humanity: he was in very deed made flesh and dwelt among us. This was the case even when his apostles beheld his glory, "the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth!" We must get a firm grip of the true humanity, or else we lose the sacrificial death, the resurrection, and all the rest; and the brotherhood of our Lord, which is a grand source of consolation, also disappears. Remember that he who sits at the right hand of God was once here in the likeness of sinful flesh. He who shall shortly come to judge the quick and dead passed through a period of limitation, weakness, suffering, weariness, since he was in human flesh. "The days of his flesh" were to him days of poverty, sickness, weariness, reproach, and temptation: though in him was no sin, yet he was tempted and tried in all points like as we are. Inasmuch as he has passed through such days as these, he is fitted to be the High Priest of believers, who also are passing through the days of their flesh. Brethren, we know too well that we are partakers of flesh and blood, and it is no mean comfort that our Lord Jesus himself took part of the same.

In the days of his flesh our divine Lord felt *his necessities*. The words, "He offered up prayers and supplications," prove that he had many needs. Men do not pray and supplicate unless they have greater need than this world can satisfy. Men work for what they can get by working, and pray for that which can by no other means be obtained. The Saviour offered no petitions by way of mere form; his supplications arose out of an urgent sense of his need of heavenly aid. It is difficult to realize it, but so it is, that our divine and innocent Saviour placed himself in such a condition for our sakes that his needs were manifold. Of course, as God, he could come under no necessity; but being man, like ourselves, he did not permit the power of his Godhead to destroy the man-like weakness of the flesh. Hence he endured such necessities as we do, and resorted, as we must, to the one all-sufficient source of supply, approaching his Father by prayer. He sought for blessings with prayers; he pleaded against evil with supplications. His approaches to God were many—both words are in the plural—"prayers and supplications;" and they were manifold in their character; for he presented prayers and supplications of all kinds. Specially in the garden he cried again and again, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me." Now, trite as the observation may be, yet it is one that needs to be often repeated, that our Saviour did really pray. When you, in your heaviness, shut the door of your chamber, and kneel down in prayer; when that prayer gathers strength, and you fall flat upon your face in agony; when you cry and weep before the Most High, under a sinking sense of need, it is hard for you to think that Jesus ever did the same. But he did so. He asked as really as you ask; he implored and be-

sought, he entreated and wrestled, even as you must do. He knows the solitary place on Carmel, where Elias bowed his head between his knees and cried seven times unto the Lord. He knows the turning of the face to the wall and the weeping of the sorrowful eyes, even as Hezekiah knew them. He can have pity upon you in your loneliness, your distraction, your apparent desertion, your sinking of heart, your sorrowfulness even unto death. Look to him, then, in your night of weeping, and be of good cheer.

Those of you who are only now beginning to pray, I would encourage you to remember Jesus as setting you the example of praying. If your prayers have but few words in them, and are mainly made up of crying and tears, yet in this they are like those of your Saviour, and so you may hope that they will be accepted. If you are afraid that your prayers are shut out from heaven, remember how the Saviour complains in the twenty-second Psalm, "O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent." He was heard in the end, but at the first he seemed to plead in vain. Jesus prayed under discouragements: what he did himself he will help you to do. He knows what the agony of prayer means, and he will cast a brother's eye on you when in the bitterness of your repentance you seek the Lord. How clear it is that we have a suitable High Priest of tender heart and loving soul!

Further, let us see how like the Son of God was to us in *his intensity* of prayer. I wish I knew how to preach upon a theme so sacred. One had need put off his shoe from off his foot upon this doubly-consecrated ground. The intensity of his prayer was such that our Lord expressed himself in "crying and

tears." The evangelists do not record his tears, but the Holy Ghost here reveals what human eyes could not have seen. He pleaded with God until his pent-up grief demanded audible utterance, and he began to cry. He said, so that the disciples heard him a stone's cast away, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." His voice grew louder as the stream of his sorrows forced a channel for itself. There was great strength in his cries—they were "strong crying:" they were deep, plaintive, touching, heart-breaking: "If it be possible—if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." We may be thankful that we did not hear the cries of that sore distress which fell upon our great Substitute. Cries are weak things, but his were *strong* cryings—strong with the heart of the Great Father. When he ceased his crying, and was silent, his tears took up the strain. The Lord heard a voice in his tears; and who shall say which spoke the more loudly, his crying or his tears? When a man so courageous, so patient as Jesus, betakes himself to cries and tears, we may be sure that the sorrow of his heart has passed all bounds. His soul within him must have been bursting with grief. We know it was so by another sign; for the life-blood forgot to course in its usual channels, and overflowed its banks in a sweat of blood. I do not think, as some do, that it was merely a sweat such as is common to labor; but I believe it was a sweat of blood, or the expression would not have been used, "as it were great drops of blood." A sweat of blood has now and then been seen upon men in great and fatal alarm; but the Saviour's was more wonderful than any of these cases; for so profuse was this bloody sweat, that it was as it were great drops of it

“falling down to the ground.” This was prayer indeed ; supplication which exhausted his whole manhood. Body, soul, and spirit were now upon the rack of anguish, and upon the strain of agony. He pleaded with God after a more piteous, painful, terrible, and powerful sort than you and I have yet attained to. But, brethren, here is the point: if it comes to your case to be in a dark, dark hour, and to be praying with the heavens like brass above your head, and if you are obliged to cry aloud, and weep your soul away, then remember Jesus in the days of his flesh. Usually it may be you are very quiet, and perhaps wordless in prayer ; but now you cannot refrain yourself: as Joseph cried so that the Egyptians in the house of Pharaoh heard him, so do you give vent to your agony. Be not ashamed of your weakness, your Lord did so before you. Strong man as you are, you weep like a child. Do not apologize lest you seem to accuse your Saviour. Behold, you are not alone! Jesus is passing through the deeps with you. See you not the blood-stained foot-print of your Lord? Your utmost anguish is known to him. Fear not. Commit your way unto the Lord, even in this worst part of it. Trust him when the iron enters into your soul. Leave all in his experienced hands.

You poor souls who have never as yet trusted my Lord, are you not attracted to him? If he suffered all this can he not meet your case? By all this he was made perfect as a High Priest ; oh, can you not trust him? Is he not able to enter into your misery? Oh, darkened hearts, is there not light here for you? When you pray with anguish Jesus perfectly understands the situation. Oh, you that loathe yourselves ! oh, you that wish you had never been born ! oh, you

daughters of melancholy, and children of despair! Can you not see in the marred visage of your Redeemer a reason for trusting him? Since from his lips you hear strong crying, and from his eyes you see showers of tears, you may well feel that his is a sympathetic spirit, to whom you may run in the hour of danger, even as the chicks seek the wings of the hen.

Still, to proceed with the text: we have seen our Lord's needs, and the intensity of his prayer; now note *his understanding* in prayer. He prayed "unto him that was able to save him from death." The expression is startling; the Saviour prayed to be saved. In his direst woe he prayed thoughtfully, and with a clear apprehension of the character of him to whom he prayed. It is a great help in devotion to pray intelligently, knowing well the character of God to whom you are speaking. Jesus was about to die, and therefore the aspect under which he viewed the great Father was as "him that was able to save him from death." This passage may be read in two ways: it may mean that he would be saved from actually dying if it could be done consistently with the glorifying of the Father; or it may mean that he pleaded to be saved out of death, though he actually descended into it. The word may be rendered either *from* or *out of*. The Saviour viewed the great Father as able to preserve him in death from the power of death, so that he should triumph on the cross: and also as able to bring him up again from among the dead. Remember how he said in the Psalm: "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." Jesus had faith in God concerning death, and prayed according to that faith. This brings our blessed Lord very near to us; he prayed in faith

even as we do. He believed in the power of God to save him from death, and even when cast down with fear he did not let go his hold on God. He pleaded just as you and I should plead, impelled by fear and encouraged by faith. Let us imitate his intensity, his intelligence, and his faith. He has condescended to set us an example which we can copy: he has come into living companionship with us in our most urgent supplications. He has had his Jabbok, therefore, O ye seed of Jacob, trust in him.

It will further help you if I now call your attention to *his fear*. I believe our old Bibles give us a correct translation, much better than the Revised Version, although much can be said of the latter, "With strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared." That is to say, he had a fear, a natural and not a sinful fear; and from this fear he was delivered by the strength brought to him from heaven by the angel. God has implanted in all of us the love of life, and we cannot part from it without a pang: our Lord felt a natural dread of death. If it be said that the Saviour was too courageous to know the fear of death, I beg to remark that he was the more courageous because he so calmly encountered that which he feared. Martyrs have died without the preceding dread which fell upon our Lord; but remember, that the help of God which sustained *them* was taken away from Jesus; and consider, also, that his death was special, and differed from that of all others of our race; for in that death there was condensed the penalty due to sin. To the righteous man death is not now a penalty, but a mode of going home: to Jesus it was in the fullest sense the penalty of death for human guilt. He saw before him, as we do not,

all the pains and torments of death; he knew what he had to bear, and foretasted in the garden the smart involved in being a surety for sinful man. The vials of God's wrath were about to be poured upon him, and Jehovah was heard saying, "Awake, O sword"—as if it had never awoken before—"Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts." He saw the abyss into which he must fall. If no dread had come upon him, why, methinks, the very essence of the atoning suffering would have been absent. Fear must take hold upon him—not that of a coward, but that of one terribly oppressed. His soul was "exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." So when you tremble after sipping your cup of bitterness, think of Jesus trembling too. When you, in entering into the valley of death's shade, feel yourself greatly disturbed at the prospect before you, think of Jesus who was heard in his fear. Come, you that fear, and find help in one who also feared. Borrow courage from one who out of fear prayed himself into victory. Think of him who cried unto God, "Be not thou far from me, O Lord: O my strength, haste thee to help me." Trust your souls with him who in the days of his flesh cried out in anguish, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

But then notice another thing in the text, namely, *his success* in prayer, which also brings him near to us. He was heard "in that he feared." O my soul! to think that it should be said of our Lord that he was heard, even as thou, a poor suppliant, art heard. Yet the cup did not pass from him, neither was the bitterness thereof in the least abated. When we are compelled to bear our thorn in the flesh and receive no other answer than, "My grace is sufficient for thee,"

let us see our fellowship with Jesus and Jesus' fellowship with us. Jesus came forth from his agony saying, "Thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns. I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee." Oh what a brother Christ is, since he, too, cried and wept, and had power with God and prevailed! When God has sent from above, and drawn us out of many waters, the Lord Jesus is there to sing with us and rejoice with us, the constant companion of all our experiences. Can we not trust him? Brothers and sisters, if Jesus rises with us to the highest note of the scale, and if he also comes down with us to the deepest bass that the human voice can reach, then we may conclude that all along he is in unison with us in all the intervening notes. So let us to-day feel that Jesus is like ourselves in all but our sin, and that we may fearlessly come and trust him as we would trust a father or a brother, or as a fond wife confides in the husband of her love.

II. Let us now spend a few moments in beholding our Lord as a Son. His prayers and pleadings were those of a son with a father: "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered."

The Sonship of our dear Saviour is well attested. The Lord declared this in the second Psalm: "Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee." Thrice, as we have already noticed, did the voice out of the excellent glory proclaim this truth, and he was "declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead." Yes; he that cried, he that wept, he that pleaded until he came to a bloody sweat, and he

from whom the cup could not pass till he had drained it to the dregs, was nevertheless the only begotten Son of God. So, my brother, when you are put to great grief, do not doubt your sonship. What son is there whom the father chasteneth not? When you are in heaviness through manifold trials, do not listen to the insinuations of the enemy: "If thou be the Son of God." Yea, if you should have to ask, "Why hast thou forsaken me?" do not doubt your sonship. Your faith should not be founded upon your own enjoyments, but upon the promise and the faithfulness of God. You are as much a son when you walk in the dark as when you rejoice in the light of Jehovah's countenance.

Being a Son, the text goes on to tell us that *he had to learn obedience*. Is not that a wonderful thing? As man our Saviour had to learn. He was of a teachable spirit, and the Lord himself instructed him. All God's children go to school, for it is written, "All thy children shall be taught of the Lord." The lesson is practical—we learn to obey. Our Lord took kindly to this lesson: he did always the things which pleased the Father. This is our time of schooling and discipline, and we are learning to obey, which is the highest and best lesson of all. How near this brings our Lord to us, that he should be a Son and should have to learn! We go to school to Christ and with Christ, and so we feel his fitness to be our compassionate High Priest.

Jesus must needs *learn by suffering*. As swimming is only to be learned in the water, so is obedience only learned by actually doing and suffering the divine will. Obedience cannot be learned at the university, unless it be at the College of Experience. You must suffer the commandment to have its way with you,

and then it will educate you. We think when we are first converted that we have learned obedience, and assuredly we have in a measure received the spirit by which we obey; but no man knows obedience till he has actually obeyed both in an active and a passive sense. Even the Lord Jesus must come under the law, honor the law, and suffer the law, or else he cannot learn obedience. Who knows what it is to obey God to the full until he has had to lay aside his own will in the most tender and painful respects? To plead with God for the life of a beloved child, and yet to see that dear child die, and to kiss the rod—this is to learn obedience. To go alone and plead with God for the life of a husband or wife, and agonize with him for the boon, and then to be compelled to weep at the new-made grave, and yet to say, “The Lord gave, and the hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord”—this is to learn obedience. Our Lord as a man was made to know by his sufferings what full obedience meant: his was practical, experimental, personal acquaintance with obedience; and in all this he comes very near to us. A Son learning obedience: that is our Lord. May we not joyfully walk with him in all the rough paths of duty? May we not safely lean on the arm of One who knows every inch of the way?

The Lord Jesus Christ learned this obedience to perfection. The text speaks of him as “being made perfect.” As a high priest he is perfect, because he has suffered to the end all that was needful to make him like unto his brethren. He has read the book of obedience quite through. He was not spared one heavy stroke of divine discipline. You and I never go to the end of grief: we are spared the utmost depth; but not so our Lord. The Lord sets us a service proportioned to

our strength; but what a service was extracted of the Son of God! Ours is a lightened burden: but the Well-beloved was not spared the last ounce of crushing sorrow. "For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings."

Our Lord learned by suffering mixed with prayer and supplication. His was no unsanctified sorrow, his griefs were baptized in prayer. It cost him cries and tears to learn the lesson of his sufferings. He never suffered without prayer, nor prayed without suffering. Supplication and suffering went hand in hand; and in this way our Lord became perfected as the high-priest of our profession.

The practical point I am trying to drive at in my poor way is this: let us trust ourselves with him who as a Son knows the training and discipline of sons. Being yourself a son, look up and see what the elder brother endured, and know that "in that he hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted." You who are afraid that you never will be the children of God, come and hear your Saviour cry as he rises from prayer, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Sons of men, whither do you wander? Why not come to him who is made like to yourselves? Which way are you looking? Look to him that suffered in your place and stead, and suffered both as a Suppliant and a Son. If you have never trusted him before, I think that you should begin this morning, now that you see his fellowship with you, his sympathy with you. I do not at this time set him forth to you in his power and glory—that I will do on another occasion; but I bring

him before you in his weakness and humiliation, hoping thereby to attract to him the poor and needy who need such a helper.

III. Time fails me, and therefore we can do no more than spend a brief time in beholding the Lord Jesus as a SAVIOUR. It is to this end that he pleaded as a Suppliant and learned obedience as a Son.

As a Saviour he is perfect. Being made perfect through suffering, he is able fully to discharge his office. Nothing is wanting in the character and person of Christ in order to his being able to save to the uttermost. He is a Saviour, and a great one. You are wholly lost, but Jesus is perfectly able to save. You are sore sick, but Jesus is perfectly able to heal. You have gone, perhaps, to the extreme of sin; he has gone to the extreme of atonement. In every office essential to our salvation Jesus is perfect. Nothing is lacking in him in any one point. However difficult your case may seem, he is equal to it. Made perfect by suffering, he is able to meet the intricacies of your trials, and to deliver you in the most complicated emergency.

Henceforth *he is the author of salvation.* What a suggestive word—the *author* of salvation! Author! How expressive! He is the cause of salvation; the originator, the worker, the producer of salvation. Salvation begins with Christ; salvation is carried on by Christ: salvation is completed by Christ. If a man is the author of a book, and not a mere compiler, it is all his own writing. Salvation has Jesus for its author. Do any of you wish to write a little of the book yourselves? Then Jesus would not be the author of it; but it would be Jesus and you. But because our Lord has assumed our nature, and entered into fellowship

with us, he has become the author of salvation, and we must not intrude into his office. Let the author of salvation complete his own work. Come and accept the salvation which he is waiting to give to you. He has finished it, and you cannot add to it; it only remains for you to receive it.

Observe that *it is eternal salvation*: “the author of *eternal* salvation.” Jesus does not serve us to-day, and leave us to perish to-morrow; he knows what is in man, and so he has prepared nothing less than eternal salvation for man. A salvation which was not eternal would turn out to be no salvation at all. Those whom Jesus saved are saved indeed. Man can be the author of temporary salvation; but only he who is “a high priest forever” can bring in a salvation which endures for ever. This reminds us of the word of the prophet: “Israel shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation.” Surely I know that whatsoever the Lord doeth shall be for ever. An eternal salvation is worth having, is it not? Jesus does not give a salvation which will let you fall from grace, and perish after all; but a salvation which will keep you to the end—though you should live to be as old as Methuselah. Salvation to eternity and through eternity is provided by Jesus. Oh, love the Lord, all ye his saints, since by his stooping to be perfected as a High Priest, he has been able to bring in for you such salvation as this.

Furthermore, inasmuch as he has learned obedience, and become a perfect High Priest, *his salvation is wide in its range*, for it is unto “all them that obey him.” Not to some few, not to a little select company here and there, but “unto all them that obey him.” One of his first commandments is “Repent.” Will you obey him in that, and quit your sin? Then he is

the author of eternal salvation to you. His great command is, "Believe and live." Will you trust him, then? For if you do, he is the author of eternal salvation to you. He whom I have tried to describe with all my heart—this blessed sympathetic fellow-sufferer of ours—he is willing and able to save all of you who will obey him at this moment by trusting him.

Come, my hearers, let Jesus be your Master and your Lord. Come, ye runaways, return to him! Come, ye castaways, hope in him! Be his, for he has made himself yours. Seek him, for he has sought you. Obey him, for he obeyed for you. He is "the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him."

Note, that *he is all this forever*, for he is a "priest forever." If you could have seen him when he came from Gethsemane, you think you could have trusted him. Oh! trust him to-day, for he is "called of God to be an high priest after the order of Melchisedec," and that order of Melchisedec is an everlasting and perpetual priesthood. He is able to-day to plead for you, able to-day to put away your sins. Oh that God the Holy Spirit may lead many of you to come and obey him at once!

A heavy atmosphere fills this Tabernacle this morning, making it difficult to speak and more difficult to hear; but yet if some sudden news came to you, as the burning of your house, or the death of a dear child, you would shake off all lethargy and wake up from all dullness and heaviness of spirit, and therefore I claim your liveliest thoughts for the solemn subject which I have introduced to you. Think much of the Son of God, the Lord of heaven and earth, who for our salvation loved and lived and served and suffered. He that made man was made man. As a suppliant with cries

and tears he pleaded with God, even he before whom the hosts of heaven bow adoringly. He has still that tenderness to which he was trained by his sufferings: he bids you now come to him. Ye that love him approach him now, and read the love which is engraven on his heart. You who have not hitherto known him, come boldly to him and trust him who has come so near to you. The Man is very near akin unto us. Behold how he loves us! He bends to us with eternal salvation in his hands. Believe in him and live. God grant it! Amen.

XVII.

OUR ASCENDED LORD.

November 7, 1886.

“Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him.”
—1 *Peter* iii. 22.

LAST Lord's-day morning we considered the humiliation of our divine Lord, and I think, if one may speak for the rest, that we consciously and deeply felt how very near he came to us in his suffering condition, and how very near he still is to us as truly man. On that happy occasion we had fellowship with him of the truest kind. The sympathy of his soul toward us awoke our sympathies towards him. We felt it exceedingly profitable to sit and weep with him who not only wept but bled for us.

This morning, in considering our Lord's glorification, I hope we shall feel quite as near to him as we did on the former occasion; for if he was humiliated for us, he is also exalted for us. If he himself once stooped to come near to us, he now lifts us up from our low estate, and brings us near to himself in his glory. It is not only that he is partaker of our lowliness, but we are partakers of his exaltation. The fellowship is full and complete; for while he takes upon himself our fall, we, on the other hand, partake in his rising again. He comes down to us in his incarnation, but he calls us up to him in his ascension: he wears

our garb of poverty by bearing our flesh, but he robes us in his splendor as he bears our nature into heaven. Remember, it is "this same Jesus" whom they saw on earth who also is gone into heaven, and who is to come again a second time. Yes, it is "this same Jesus;" and he is not less man on the throne than he was on the cross: he is as truly our brother now, amid the acclaim of angels as among the weeping women of Jerusalem. I beseech you, do not let the change of his estate create any distance in *your* hearts, since there is no distance in *his* heart; but the rather ask for grace that you may rise up unto him, to joy in his joy, and triumph in his triumph. Let us behold our Lord's glories to-day, not as a blaze of intolerable splendor, driving us back with fear, but as a radiance of peace, drawing us near with hope. Let us go to the land where our greater Joseph is Lord of all; let us go into his palace, let us sit at his table with him there, as he once sat at our table with us here. We went to David in the cave, let us not fear to approach him now that he is king; yea, let us rejoice that we share his royalty, for he hath made us kings and priests, and we shall reign with him for ever and ever.

The history of our Lord after his death is as simple as it is sublime, and I shall not try to set it forth with garnishings of human speech. When a renowned warrior writes home after great victories, his despatches are short and to the point; the brilliance of the news is sufficient without the light of sparkling sentences. His words are few; he has so much to tell that he does not waste a letter. His achievements are so great that they do not require the aid of poetry or oratory. A dash from the conqueror's pen,

is enough to set a nation rejoicing. "I came, I saw, I conquered," is a line which will be quoted to the end of time. Such is the life of our Lord Jesus, from the cross onward. If I seem to preach very plainly, and even badly, this morning, you will understand that my theme forbids the adornments which other subjects invite.

Our Saviour died, but he rose again. It is a sort of courtesy to death to speak of the period of our Lord's entombment as three days. The victory of death was so short that Scripture can afford to let it be reckoned in the roughest manner, to give to death the utmost it could claim by the broadest method of reckoning. Give death his three days: that is the outside of all his victory. Let death and hell make the best they can of it; the bruised heel of the seed of the woman soon ceases to be lame.

When the first day of the week began to dawn, ere yet the sun had gleamed through the veil of the olives, and lit up the garden of Joseph of Arimathæa, our Lord arose from his slumber, and began to disrobe himself of his grave-clothes. In orderly manner he folded them up, and divided them with intent of instruction. He left the grave-clothes for us, that our last chamber may be fitly furnished and tapestried when we shall come to lie therein: and then he put the napkin by itself, that our friends may dry their tears thereon when they remember that there is now a glorious hope in death for all who are in Christ. The living Lord waited a while, and then the messenger from the courts of heaven descended to set him free. The angels touched the stone which shut the mouth of the grave; the stone removed; the risen one came forth from the damp of the vault into the freshness

of the morning air, affrighting the watchmen, and causing the solid earth to quake with fear. He was as truly risen as he had been truly dead. He was no apparition or phantom; but that body which had most certainly given up the ghost now received life again.

Our Lord tarried here for forty days; a time sufficient for the establishment of his identity and the production of proof of the fact that he had truly risen. During that forty days he so showed himself in divers places that the testimony to his resurrection became most abundant and convincing. He was seen by ones and twos, who could the more carefully examine him because they were alone with him. He was tested by one who put his finger into the print of the nails, and thrust his hand into his side: nothing could be more conclusive than the verdict of that suspicious examiner. He was seen by about five hundred brethren at once, that by the eyes of many the fact of his being the once crucified Jesus might be ascertained beyond all further question. His appearance was not a vision beheld by one or two enthusiasts when alone; he was manifestly set forth among a great company as their Lord and Master who had been cruelly put to death, but had risen from among the dead. Our Saviour would not go to heaven till he had settled the fact of his resurrection upon a basis which can never be shaken. There is no fact in history, ancient or modern, which is half so well attested as the resurrection of our Lord from the dead. You shall turn to the pages of the most veracious and sober historians of any age you please, but you will not there find such assured evidence of any event as the gospels give to us of the rising again of Jesus. Events which we now speak of as indisputable are not

so surely true as that Jesus, who was taken down from the cross and laid in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathæa, did really rise, and live again among the sons of men.

He tarried forty days, not only for the establishment of this great truth, but for the comfort of his disciples. He wiped away the tears which they shed at his death, and made them feel that it was no longer a calamity that their Lord had died. He also prepared them for the more enduring grief of his departure: indeed, he so elevated their minds and raised their spirits, that we never hear of their lamenting his ascension. He made them see that it was expedient that he should go away, that the Comforter might come to them. He also communed with them, gave them of his Spirit, and filled them with his peace. He raised them from being common peasants to be the patriarchs of a new age, the vanguard of the divine crusaders, who would conquer the world for Jesus. They went forth strong in the Lord and in the power of his might, because he had spoken to them, and they had heard from his own lips the gospel which they were commissioned to proclaim.

He stayed also long enough to give them directions how to act: in fact, he organized his forces, ordered their line of battle, and prepared them for the victory. To all he gave the direction to tarry at Jerusalem till they were endowed with power from on high, and in that command we have our marching-orders for all time. Some of the disciples he had to address individually, for they had special need. He had to cheer the heart of Magdalene, to overcome the unbelief of Thomas, to give warning and encouragement to Peter, and to brace them all for their coming struggle. The great Shepherd of the sheep could not return unto his

rest till he had seen to every sickly sheep, and put the whole flock in order. He would not go to his glory till he could leave all whom the Father gave him prepared for their future destiny.

Those forty days were soon over. Very remarkable days they were, if you study them; so different from his former life. Nobody molested the Lord; no scribes or Pharisees contradicted him, no malicious Jews took up stones to stone him. Those were halcyon days, days wherein the birds of peace sat on the still waters and not a wave ruffled the calm. I might almost say that those days were the prelude of his glory, a sort of anticipation of his reign of peace, when he shall stand in the latter day upon the earth, and wars shall cease unto the end of the earth. When those forty days were over, the Master went his way. All was done that he had covenanted to perform, and he ascended to his reward. Now we have come to our text.

I shall this morning, first of all, *rehearse the circumstances* which are here mentioned in three parts,—he has gone into heaven; he is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers are made subject unto him. When I have rehearsed these circumstances, I shall then, beloved, by the help of God's Spirit, ask you to *learn the simple but sublime lessons* which these facts are meant to teach us.

I. First, LET US REHEARSE THE CIRCUMSTANCES.

They begin thus—“*Who is gone into heaven.*” “He is gone:” that sounds rather dolorous. You might touch the mournful string as you hear these words; for if he is gone, we are bereaved indeed. Yet we dare not raise a monument to Christ as one who is dead. Let us complete the sentence,—“who is gone *into heaven.*” Now you demand the trumpet, for the

words are full of soul-stirring music, and create intense delight.

Still, there are the words, "*he is gone:*" he is gone away from you and from me; we cannot now embrace his feet, nor wash them, nor lean our head upon his bosom, nor look into his face. We have to sing to our Well-beloved,—

“ Jesus, these eyes have never seen
That radiant form of thine !
The veil of sense hangs dark between
Thy blessed face and mine ! ”

Henceforth we are strangers here because he is not here. He intends us to remove, for he has removed. We are not at home on earth. If he were here we might think this world could be our abiding place: but it cannot be so now. If he were here earth would be a kind of heaven to us; but away from him it is a place of exile. If we could now run to him and tell him our griefs as they arise they would cease to be griefs. But Jesus does not mean this to be our lot and portion. Our inheritance is not on this side Jordan. Truly, this world, and all the works that are therein, are to be burned up; in token whereof he is gone from it. It is vain for us to think that we can make our abode here. We are ourselves to go away soon, and, therefore, he is gone.

“ When he arose, ascending high
He taught our feet the way.”

He seems to say, “Upwards, my brethren, upwards from off this earth; away from this world to the glory land. I am gone, and you must be gone. This is not your place of resting, but you must prepare yourselves, for a time when it shall be said of each one of you, ‘He is gone.’” Those who linger behind us

will see us no more, for we shall be gone into heaven to be with our Lord in his kingdom. I like to remember that our Lord Jesus is gone in the entirety of his nature. His body is gone. He has not left his flesh in the grave. Jesus has carried with him his entire self, his whole humanity.

Therein I do rejoice; for he has carried my nature to heaven with him: my heart is with him on his throne, and all my being longs to follow it. Jesus has taken our manhood into heaven. He is in heaven, our Adam, the representative of his people. He has taken us up with himself, beloved, even all of us who are in him. He has gone into heaven in his true and proper manhood. In the New Jerusalem he looks like a Lamb that has been slain, and still he wears his priesthood, his manhood and his sympathetic heart. He who is gone into heaven is not a changeling, but the real Christ. We shall know him there if we have known him here. He on whose head are many crowns is identical with the Christ whose head was encircled with thorns. Despite the change in his circumstances, there is no change in him; he is "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." He, his own self, who bare our sins, is gone up into heaven.

We have dwelt long enough upon the words, "he is gone;" now let us consider that he "is gone *into heaven*." What does this signify but, first, that he is gone out of the region wherein our senses can perceive him? Make you sure of this, that you will not now see him, nor touch him, nor handle him. He is gone into heaven, out of reach of our earth-bound senses. It is a vain idea of carnal-minded men that Christ is corporeally in the sacrament. He is gone into heaven. His very flesh and blood cannot be here among us. He

is gone up into heaven, and therefore he is not where he can be recognized by these bodily senses. Spiritually he is here, according to his promise, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world;" but to say that he is here corporeally, is to deny that he is gone up into heaven. As man, as his body was of substance, it is not capable of being in more than one place at a time. You must not transform his humanity into deity; his deity is everywhere, but his substantial humanity can only be in its one proper place, and to suppose it to be everywhere is virtually to deny that it is anywhere. A covert unbelief in the reality of our Lord's body thus veils itself under the appearance of a superstitious faith. Jesus is really and indeed gone into heaven, and, therefore, we see him not, we hear him not, and our communion with him is by faith, and not by the senses.

But then, beloved, we know that our Lord, as a man, is gone into a greater nearness to God than ever; "He is gone into heaven," where is the throne of the great King. The high priest on the day of atonement lifted the mysterious veil which shut in the Holy of Holies; he passed within, and the veil fell between him and the people. They could not possibly see him while he was performing his sacred functions; but they knew that he stood before the throne of God. Though he was not with them, he was with God, which was better for them. The high priest was more useful to them within the veil than outside of it; he was doing for them out of sight what he could not accomplish in their view. I delight to think that my Lord is with the Father. Sometimes I cannot get to God, my access seems blocked by my infirmity; but he is always with God to plead for me. Sometimes my interces-

sions seem to die outside the veil; but his prayers are ever within the holy place, since he himself is there, and presenting his potent pleas directly to the Father, being always accepted of him. Let us joy and rejoice that our covenant Head is now in the bosom of the Father, at the fountain head of love and grace, and that he is there on our behalf.

In going into heaven there is also this thought, that our Lord is gone now into the place of perfect happiness and of complete glory. We rightly sing—

“No more the bloody spear,
The cross and nails no more,
For hell itself shakes at his name,
And all the heavens adore.”

No weariness, no mockery, no sinking of heart, no bearing of reproach, no crying, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” He is gone into peace, and bliss, and honor, and renown. “Heaven” is a great word, none of us can understand it, nor shall we approach its meaning till we reach the place. He is where there are pleasures for evermore. The human soul and body of Jesus are filled with delight; the man Christ Jesus, the son of Mary, he that died upon the cross, is now blessed for evermore. The Lord Jesus is filled with ineffable satisfaction, which is the reward of his passion and his death. Let us this day be glad and rejoice in him, for he is gone up into heaven.

Thinking this over, let us reflect, dear brethren, that nothing could stop his going there. “He is gone up into heaven, despite all who raged against him.”

Death could not hold him. Death bound him very fast with the strongest cords, but he could not be holden of them. This great monster must give up Jesus, even as another monster gave up Jonah, after the third day. Our greater Jonas came up again from

the depths of the earth. He died and was a captive for our sakes; but his body could not see corruption, nor could his soul abide in the realms of death-shade. He is gone to heaven, despite the stone, the watch, the seal: despite the clay-cold hand of death.

He is gone into heaven despite malicious men. Have you never wondered why they did not attack him when he had showed himself openly, and had led out his disciples to the Mount of Olives? They suborned the soldiers to say that his disciples stole him away while they slept; why did they not seize on him? Why is Herod so quiet, and Caiaphas so still? Scribes and Pharisees, where are they? Are these lions chained? Our greater Daniel is in their den, but they do not even roar upon him. It is now or never with them: if they could capture him now and stop his way to his eternal triumph, it would be a great victory. It is the last chance for the overthrow of his power. But truly against him did not a dog move his tongue. They were still as a stone while he passed over to take possession of the inheritance.

As death could not hinder him, so neither could the malice of men detain him, nor could all the forces of the devil block his way. I see no trace of the arch-enemy after Christ has risen from the dead. O Prince of darkness, thou didst meet him in the wilderness at the beginning, why not close with him at the end? Why not assail him by sea when he stands there with his coals of fire, with fish laid thereon, and bread? Prince of darkness, why didst thou not hasten up to shoot a last arrow at him. and summon all thy bands to waylay him in mid-air to block his passage to the Golden City? No, the powers of darkness were baffled: in their silence they gnashed their teeth for

rage, but they could not even hiss against him. He had so thoroughly cowed and subdued Satan and all his angels in Gethsemane and on the cross, that nothing remained but to triumph over them, and lead captivity captive. The leaguered hosts of hell could not summon courage for another encounter: his warfare was accomplished, and the road to his Father's capital lay open before him. In peaceful triumph he passed beyond the clouds. Troops of angels on the road met with their joyful songs the heir of all things returning to his home. My heart rejoices as I think that he is gone into heaven, none disputing his passage.

But I beg you to remember that he is gone up into heaven *as our representative*. Jesus does nothing by himself now. All his people are with him. He says: "Behold I and the children which God hath given me." They are always in union with him. The Head is never sundered from the members: the supposition is ghastly. He is our Forerunner marking the way; our Herald predicting our coming; our Breaker clearing the road. As the great Lord calls them home it shall be said of each one of the saints, "who is gone into heaven:" Jesus is gone there as Pioneer to open the way, as our Friend to prepare a place for us, and as the Pledge that all who are in him shall come to the same felicity. If he had not entered, neither could we; but in his person God has given to us a token that we also shall rise from the dead, and shall enter into heaven. He who is the Surety of the covenant is our guarantee of entrance into heaven. This is the best seal that our faith could desire, the resurrection and ascension of Christ being practically the resurrection and the home-bringing of all his redeemed. I forbear: the Lord bless this to your souls.

Secondly, we have to look at the next circumstance, *his sitting at the right hand of God*: “who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God.” Remember that this being on the right hand of God relates to the complex person of our Lord: it relates to him not as God alone, but as God and man. It is his manhood that is at the right hand of God. Wonderful conception! The next being to God is man. Infinite leagues must necessarily lie between the Creator and the created; but between God and man in Christ Jesus there seems no distance at all: the man Christ Jesus sits at God’s right hand. Is not this a sublime thought, that man, creature as he is, is now so linked with the Second Person of the Divine Trinity in Unity, that he is so near to God as to be just at his right hand? So near, so very near to God, he cannot nearer be. This is a wonderful thing, Jesus sits at the right hand of God as man, and man is thus brought into a singular nearness to God. As I said before, there is a chasm immeasurable between God and a seraph, and yet man, whom he made a “little lower than the angels,” and who was consequently a little further off, is in the person of the Son of God brought so near to God that no being of any kind now intervenes between the Almighty God and man.

What meaneth it that Christ sits at the right hand of God? Does it not mean, first, unrivalled honor? To sit at the right hand of God is the highest conceivable glory. The mother of Zebedee’s children asked that her sons might sit the one on his right hand and the other on his left in his kingdom; but Jesus said it was not his to give. The Father has given the Son to sit in the highest place nearest to the throne, yea, on the very throne, of God; for we read

of "the throne of God and of the Lamb." Jesus, our brother, is elevated to the throne of the Most High.

Does not it also signify intense love? When Solomon would describe the love of the King to his bride, he said, "Upon thy right hand did stand the queen in gold of Ophir." The Lord God places the Son of man in the seat of love, where none may be but the one who is the beloved of the Father. He loves him with an unutterable, inconceivable love; and even thus does he love us in him. Christ at the right hand of God means all his people at the right hand of God: all the saints are in the place of the nearest and dearest love.

It means also communion and counsel. We speak of a person with whom we take advice as "the man of our right hand." God taketh counsel with the man Christ Jesus. When you have a friend at court, you hope you will do well; but what a friend have we in the King's courts; even him who is the Wonderful, Counsellor! He is the king of glory, the governor of earth, the distributor of thrones and crowns, the man Christ Jesus. Now I know that the decree of God must mean my good; for my Lord sits at the right hand of him that doth decree. Now I understand that the purposes of God must work out the happiness of the chosen; for he who loves them is in union with the Maker of the purpose.

Does it not also signify perfect repose? Jesus is gone up to the right hand of God, and sitteth there. While he was occupied with his holy service, he did not sit down. There were no seats for the priests in the tabernacle; their work was too laborious for sitting down. But Jesus has forever taken his seat at the right hand of God, expecting till his enemies are made his footstool. O restful Saviour, we toiling and laboring,

come to thee and find rest in thee: we also sit down longing for and expecting the time when thou shalt put down all our enemies, and we shall tread even Satan under our feet. Even now we sit with thee in the heavenlies and enjoy thy peace. So much concerning the session of our Lord.

The third fact is, *his dominion*: "angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him." Angels are subject to him upon whom objects spat,—to him whom they nailed to the cross, and at whom they wagged their heads. This is one of the wonders of heaven. Is it possible that the conjecture of the old writers was true, that Satan rebelled against God because he heard a whisper that a man would one day be head over all principalities and powers? I do not know; but certainly the angels must often marvel that not Gabriel, nor the brightest of the seraphim, is next to God; but, a man! Lord, what is man! Man made of the dust of the earth, what is he that he should sit above more spiritual beings, crowned with glory and honor? Yet it is so. God has set the Christ above all angels and principalities and powers. Is not this one of those things which angels desire to look into? Although Lucifer hath fallen, there is yet no gap in heaven. Creatures in part material are lifted up to fill the void caused by the great dragon, when he drew down with his tail the third part of the stars of heaven. Men in countless myriads are in heaven white robed, praising God; and one Man is actually on the throne of God, vicegerent, Lord over all; having every knee to bow before him, and every tongue to call him Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Oh, think of it; the man Christ Jesus is Lord of all the shining ones! He can send an angel to comfort you

in your grief. "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" When you count up the available forces of your Lord, do not forget these invisible armies. Did he not say in the hour of his agony, "Can I not now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?" The air will soon teem with invisible spirits if they are needed for our defence, for our Saviour is their Lord. They will count it all joy to do his bidding on our behalf. They are the chariots of God, in which he rideth to the rescue of his own. The day shall come when all the hosts of heaven shall come down to earth, attending the Son of man; then shall they gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and at the same time they shall delight to display their loyalty to him that once did hang upon the cross. We rejoice to-day that God hath set him far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named.

But I must not forget that he has power over all devils as well. They are fallen angels, and Jesus has subdued them once for all. They cannot tempt his followers without his permission; they cannot put forth their finger to bring any calamity upon a Job unless God wills it. These dogs are muzzled; wherefore fear them not.

"A faithful God restrains their hands,
And binds them down in iron bands."

Jesus is Lord of all.

Whatever else this term "angels and authorities and powers" may comprehend, Christ hath under his sway; that is to say, all kings and princes upon earth, all leaders of thought—political or religious—all con-

trollers of human movements, are subject unto him. Do not be afraid of this or that form of anarchy; nothing can shake the eternal throne of the Prince of Peace. Monarchs may die and crumble back to dust, and their empires with them; but the throne of the Son of David shall endure for ever and ever. No acts of senators, nor decrees of despots, nor ragings of the multitude, nor foamings of rebels, nor deliverances of sages, can interfere in the least degree with the supreme power of Jesus of Nazareth. His very cross proclaimed him King, and King he is. Be cheered by his reign. "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." It is surely so, for the Lord has given Jesus the kingdom, and he shall reign for ever and ever.

Yes, and all kinds of forces other than human are under subjection to Jesus. The Psalmist, when he measured the domain of man, said,—“Thou madest him to have dominion over all the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet: all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas.” We see not yet all things put under man; but we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor. All things this day bow before the Lord Jesus, willingly or unwillingly. It matters not what powers, and forces, and energies may be now developed, or may be yet developed in the ages to come; they are all subject to the Lord Christ. That heel which once was bruised when the serpent wounded it, hath crushed the dragon's head and holds it down upon the earth. Life, death, and hell, and worlds unknown, lie in subjection

unto him that liveth and was dead. O that my Lord had a servant that could worthily tell out his glories! Great princes have their heralds, who with blast of trumpet proclaim their honors and dignities; but who shall proclaim the glories of the Son of man, who once died for our sins? Come, let us rejoice together in the victories of our Leader and Lord! I know of no better theme to stir the pulses of my soul with holy exultation than the thought that Jesus is victor. I have heard of wounded men crushed amid a heap of bleeding bodies lying on the battle-field, and rousing all the life that remained in them when they saw the great Napoleon come riding over the plain. With their legs gone, they raised themselves upon their arms once more to salute their captain. Poor souls! to be thus enthusiastic for one who shed their blood like water; far more wise is our enthusiasm for him who shed his blood for us. If I knew that I must die in a ditch, and be forgotten or slandered and abhorred of men, I would yet rejoice and cry "Hosanna" at the prospect of my Lord's sure victory. Yea, I will salute him now with my most hearty praises, and be glad, because I know that he is even now King of kings and Lord of lords. Hallelujah! He of whom they said, "Crucify him, crucify him," is now head over all. There I leave it. God grant us grace to rejoice in this story of our Lord!

II. Secondly, and very briefly, LET US LEARN THE LESSONS OF THESE CIRCUMSTANCES.

The first lesson is—*the religion of Christ is true*. Whenever I read modern doubts—and you cannot read long without coming across them—I am glad to get back to facts. If you read a certain set of modern sermons, you will find all the eternal verities denied or

maligned. Too many ministers, instead of being servants of Christ, are servants of the devil dressed in the livery of God: the Lord have mercy upon them! Whenever a doubt is proposed to me I fall back upon this fact: Jesus did rise from the dead. That is sure. He did also ascend into heaven, for his disciples saw him rise. Well, then, I am satisfied to be the least of his disciples, and to take his word, and the words of his inspired apostles, and believe them, even though faith be denounced as ridiculous. "You are left behind in the march of progress. You are poor fools who cannot think for yourselves." I confess that I am such a fool: I believe what God has revealed. I have more confidence in the revelation of God than in the opinions of men. I know nothing among men save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. For this is the truth! We know it! We have facts at our back. Our doctrine is not a sentiment, and view, and opinion, but fact. "Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him."

I learn another lesson,—that *Christ's cause is safe*. Let not his church tremble, let her not think of putting out the hand of unbelief to steady the ark of the Lord. The history of the church is to be the history of Christ repeated: she is to be betrayed, she is to be scourged, she is to be falsely accused and spitted on; she may have her crucifixion and her death; but she shall rise again. Her Master rose, and like him she shall rise and receive glory. You can never kill the church till you can kill Christ; and you can never defeat her till you defeat the Lord Jesus, who already wears the crown of triumph. The grand old cause is safe. The outlook may be dark just now, and it may be unpopular

to follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth; but the day shall come when they who do so shall walk in white, for they are worthy. The wheel will turn, and they that are lowest now shall soon be highest: they that have been with him in the dust shall be with him in his glory.

Now I can see that *his saints are safe*, for if Jesus has risen and gone into his glory, then each individual in him shall be safe too. Where does your hope lie, brother? Why, in Christ. Well, then, your hope is always safe, is it not? If you have any hope outside of him, it may perish; but if your hope is all within him your treasure is all within the heavenly casket, and it is always secure. Wherefore, be you glad and rejoice. You, too, may have to cry, "Why hast thou forsaken me?" You, too, may thirst. You, too, may die. But you shall live again, and you shall triumph; for as he is, so are you; and what Jesus is, that you shall be in him.

I can also see another lesson here: *this explains the way in which Jesus deals with sinners*. That which took place in his own person he makes to be a picture of what takes place in the men whom he saves. If you come to him you can only get to know the fulness of his gracious power by being scourged and buffeted with conviction and repentance, and by having self, especially self-righteousness, crucified and slain. You must know the destruction of self, you must see death written upon all carnal hopes, and then out of that death you shall live again in newness of life, and you shall receive honor and glory and immortality. Wherefore, dear troubled heart, if Christ be killing thee, be thou assured he will make thee alive; for this is what he saith, even he, the mighty God, "I kill and I make

alive; I wound, and I heal." The history of Christ has to be written out again in us. Death to sin and a new life unto righteousness must be ours. That is a lesson worth the learning.

And so I must close with one more division which will have several points in it. I think, beloved, since Christ has gone into heaven and sits at the right hand of God, *it shows which way we ought to go.* "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." He draws them to the cross, and you may be sure he will draw them to the crown. Do you think he has lost his attraction, now that he sits on the throne? Not he. He is drawing us up this morning. Let us send all our thoughts upward; our desires, our rejoicings, our aspirations, let them all climb Jacob's ladder up to the Lord. Oh that we could at once rise to him! Stop a while, my soul! Be patient through thine appointed days. Though thou canst ill brook delay, yet tarry his leisure; for thy Lord himself had to wait. He had his time of tarrying, and so must thou, in order that thou mayest have fellowship with him in his sufferings. Still feel the drawings. Remember that pretty parable given by one of our ministers, of the boy's kite. He made it fly aloft: it rose up so high that he could no longer see it. Still he said he had a kite, and he held fast by it. "Boy, how do you know you have a kite?" "I can feel it pull," said he. This morning we feel our Jesus pull. He draws us with a far greater force than a mere string. He is gone into heaven, and he draws us after him. O Lord, draw us with greater power than ever. "Draw me, we will run after thee." Do we not feel as though we could kneel down and pray over those words of the spouse? Wait a bit, and soon you shall climb the shining way to em-

brace your risen Lord. Yield to his upward drawing! Do not pull away from him to grasp earth and things that are earthly; but yield to his drawings. As you yield to them, begin to sing: He has conquered! He has conquered! He has conquered! What matters it though my garments be rolled in dust and blood? He hath conquered! He hath conquered! What doth it matter though the arrows fly thick about me, winged by the feathers of death? He hath conquered! He hath conquered! My soul, grasp thou the victory; for there is laid up for thee also a crown of life that fadeth not away. God bless you, brethren, for Jesus' sake!

